

Love is a Battlefield

by Midii Une

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Summary: The sequel to Returning Favors Linnea is torn between the desire to create and the urge to return to Duo and Quatre.

## 1. Love is a Battlefield, Chapter 1

Author's Note: Not as good as the first two, but it has its moments. Stick with me, the fourth part (Ordinary World) promises to be a doozy, but ya gotta read this one first!! Don't worry I won't let you down there are still lots of good parts in here!! And hey, if you read this whole story, starting with "Studying Duo" you might be able to pass it off as a summer reading requirement. After all, it's actually the size of a novel ^\_~. This one's a definite R ( I think I've finally got the hang of writing lemons, well they're probably only limes. ~\_~ I would describe this as containing \*adult situations\*)

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>LOVE IS A BATTLEFIELD<br>

>By Midii Une <br>(formerly YamchaOtaku)

><br>. . . after "Returning Favors"

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><br>

>CHAPTER ONE<br>

><br>

> Officer Sieben looked the girl over and he liked what he saw. A little pale and sad-looking but that could be overlooked. Strands of her wavy blonde hair fell charmingly about her face and she kept her extraordinary violet eyes fastened to the floor as she murmured a request to see Col. Treize. And her figure . . . He could only hope that Gen. Treize would order him to search her and make sure she wasn't carrying any concealed weapons. It wasn't a likely scenario, but there was always a first time. <br>

> He knocked on the office door and entered. "There is a young lady to see you, Gen. Treize," Sieben said.<br>

> Gen. Treize paused for thought. It had been so long he had started to believe he had failed, that she would never come to him. Could it

be Linnea Lang? <br>

> "What does she look like?" he asked Sieben. The word "delectable" was on the tip of Sieben's tongue, he was as fond of pastry as he was of pretty girls, but he didn't dare say such a thing in front of His Excellency. "Young, very pretty," he substituted instantly.<br>

> Treize's eyes lit up, although many girls fit that description, he knew it had to be her. She had drawn out the game but he had finally won, he was sure of it. He knew that yet again one of his little birds had returned to its cage.<br>

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> She stood by a window waiting, the same as the first time he had seen her.<br>

> Her eyes were different, no less beautiful, but they had lost their luster as if she had lost all the youthful, carefree joy that had personified her. Although it was to his advantage, Treize felt resentment that someone had taken that from her. He had been able to tell from her kiss that she had been deeply involved with someone. One of those Gundam pilots perhaps. The resentment however was not enough to stop him from taking advantage of her vulnerability to seal his victory and complete his conquest. You didn't win wars by doing things halfway.<br>

> "Someone hurt you?" he questioned softly, pulling her against him comfortingly and gently stroking her silky hair. "Don't let the actions of a foolish boy break your heart Linnea. To let you go anyone would have to be a fool. Believe me. Close the book and forget it ever happened."<br>

> He held her closer and without conviction she said, "This isn't why I came here." <br>

> But, she asked herself, if that was true why could she feel every beat of her heart like a heavy thud in her chest? Why did his hand on her hair make her feel like she had come home from some far away, awful place? Why did she feel that if he pushed her away now life just wouldn't be worth living? How did he know how much she needed someone to care about her right now, to hold her?<br>

> "I think it is," he said, tightening his grip on her to prevent her from pulling away. "Start your life all over again. Trust your decision to come here. Trust me that this is the best way to forget the pain." <br>

> She didn't resist when he tilted her face up to his and he kissed her over and over with increasing intensity and she closed her eyes when he slowly undid the buttons of her white silk blouse and pushed it away from her shoulders. Her body gave in to him and as for her mind, her mind was numb with pain and it didn't care what happened to her anymore but her body remembered passion. She clung to his promise that it would make her forget. And oh how she wanted to forget, to erase the look in Duo's eyes as he had told her that he had been wrong about her, never known the real her and wouldn't have liked her if he had. Told her that everything they had been to each other was a mistake. A huge, awful, painful mistake. <br>

> He had a strange impulse to push her down on the desk and make love to her right here and now in the office when her kisses and soft sighs signalled her surrender. But since he was a gentleman he lifted her in his arms and carried her into the bedroom which fortunately adjoined the office. Lovemaking should always take place in a bed, Treize thought, preferably a large one.<br>

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> She lay in the gloomy half-light of dawn still dazed with sleep, the room she was in could have been any room, any place. It remained an unidentified location in the dim light that filtered through heavy velvet curtains. Last night could have been a dream, a strangely

realistic, erotic dream. She could still be in the Cinq Kingdom, the arm draped possessively over her as she lay in a tangle of sheets could be Duo's.<br>

> Her eyes slowly adjusted to the light and she glanced at the man sleeping next to her. She shut her eyes quickly. It had not been a dream. She had really done those things. With him. And in doing so she had closed the door forever on Duo. She didn't even remember making a conscious decision. How had she ended up like this?<br>

> She sat up carefully and tucked the silk sheet around herself and rubbed her hand over her eyes trying to come fully awake. She thought about it. She could never go back now, not ever. Linnea hadn't thought her heart could ache any more than it had the last few days, but she had obviously been wrong. For a long time she sat there as the light in the room grew brighter, thinking about what she should do now, what direction her life should take. Finally she decided.<br>

> She had to start her life again, her life without Duo in it. Well, she would show him, show everyone that she could do it. She was young, she was smart and now she had connections in high places. Freedom for the colonies, peace for space. Her goals had not changed and she could work on those goals from right here in Luxembourg. And her first step would be completing Epyon for Col. Treize. He was right. He was always right. Their goals were not so far apart. And if it took a battle to make it happen so be it. She studied history, war was as old as humankind, who was she to try and stop it?<br>

> He looked at her as she sat there, the pale skin of her back as smooth as the silk sheet she was wrapped in, her long hair streaming down her back in soft waves. She was as still and motionless as a beautiful piece of sculpture. Treize reached out a hand and tugged softly on her hair and when she turned to him he could see that she had made a decision. That she was ready to agree to be his ally. Some of her confidence had returned, replacing the lost, broken look. He pulled her down so she lay against him again.<br>

> "Col. Treize," she said softly. "It's Gen. Treize now," he answered, as his hand traced an absent pattern on the soft bare skin of her back. But I think when we're alone together you can just call me Treize . . ."<br>

> "Treize," she tested the name and raised her head from his shoulder and leaned her chin on the hand that rested on his chest to look at him. The movement caused her hair to brush softly over his arm and shoulder. The whisper-light touch of it on his skin made him want her again. <br>

> Victory was a powerful aphrodisiac. She had come back and she would never, never leave. What a challenge she had been. He had transformed her from a frightened girl with a stubborn attachment to the rebellion forces to a woman who would do anything for him.<br>

> Yes, he had made the right decision, he thought. There were women that needed the act of passion to tie them to you. He had guessed correctly that Linnea was one of those. For others it was the promise of passion withheld, the occasional brief touch, a significant meeting of the eyes. A thought of Lady Une slipped through his mind and was gone again. This new relationship had nothing to do with what they shared, and if she knew about it she would understand and support him as she always did. Nothing Treize could ever do would change Lady Une's image of him. Then he focussed his undivided attention on Linnea again.<br>

> Linnea thought objectively to herself that this wasn't love. He did not love her and she did not love him. But as she had learned, love was overrated and what they were beginning to share was a more than tolerable substitute. And if she didn't love him, he couldn't hurt

her.<br>>\*\*\*\*\* <br>><br> "Thanks for the fuel. I'm sorry, I don't think I'll ever be able to return the favor," Duo told Miss Noin as he prepared to leave the Cinq Kingdom.

><br> "I wish you would stay here. Won't you please take some time and think about it," Noin said. "Miss Relena doesn't know it but the Cinq Kingdom is going to need the Gundams to defend it. Romefeller won't rest until absolute pacifism returns to the shelf as a textbook theory. And that means Miss Relena's in danger. The whole Cinq Kingdom is at risk. I know you're upset . . ."

><br> "I don't want to talk about it. I just have to get out of here," Duo said. "My mission has always been to protect the colonies. Staying here on Earth was never part of the deal. There's no reason for me to be here."

><br> "Not anymore."

><br> Like Linnea he couldn't stand to stay in the Cinq Kingdom a minute longer than he had to. He had dreamed she came back, dreamed she was sitting on the bed looking at him, her purple eyes shimmering with tears. But when he went to touch her she disappeared. DeathScythe especially reminded him of her. He opened the cockpit and saw her sitting there working on some gadget. Her smile was so sweet and her eyes full of trust. Trust he had destroyed. It was over between them, it could never be fixed. But that didn't stop the sharp edges from hurting, it didn't stop him from aching for her.

><br> "If it makes you feel better I think we're all going to end up back on the same side eventually," Noin said, making a final attempt to get the Gundam pilot to stay. The Cinq Kingdom needed all the help it could get. A pilot like Duo Maxwell could make all the difference. "The Treize Faction, like us, is up against Romefeller. It's inevitable that our two sides will fight together in the future."

><br> Fighting alongside Treize Khushrenada was not a sufficient temptation to keep Duo on Earth. In fact it was the last thing he ever wanted to do. All Noin could do was watch him leave. And as he headed for space Duo made a decision. He wasn't ready for love or the responsibility that went with it. To hell with love . . .

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><br> "Vier," Treize said, calling his former lead engineer to attention. "This is Miss Linnea, she will be heading up the Epyon project as of now. Your job will be to see that she has everything she needs. She is in total command of the project. Do you understand?"

><br> Vier looked in disbelief. This Miss Linnea was nothing but a schoolgirl. She was in command? He would follow her instructions? Gen. Treize could not be serious. He looked at him. He was indeed serious.

><br> The girl brushed past him impatiently and went to inspect the construction that was taking place on Epyon. Her pretty face crumpled into a petulant frown and she tapped a finger to her lips thoughtfully.

><br> "Your Excellency," she said. "I'm afraid not much of this can be salvaged. It will be best to wait until I restore the designs and start over. I'll do the best I can to save some of this, but . . ." She shrugged a little and tapped on the chunk of Gundanium alloy with the tip of her black riding boot. She hopped nimbly down off the arm joint of the mobile suit and without hesitation sat down at his computer terminal and started restoring the files that the virus had deleted. She did it without effort, the design seemed to be complete

in her memory.

><br> It really had been her, Vier thought, continuing to look at her in disbelief. This girl was the one who had designed Epyon. Hers was the design he could not recreate . . . it was his replacement design that she said could not be salvaged. Everything came to her so easily, things he had tried years to accomplish. She obviously had the General's favor. And now he would have to take orders from her. A mere girl.

><br> She spoke again, this time there was a smile in her voice. "Gen. Treize, I hope the coffee here is better than what they tried to pass off at OZ headquarters?"

><br> Vier was shocked at the casual way she addressed His Excellency. But Gen. Treize only seemed amused and only too happy to indulge her every wish.

><br> "Of course it's better. Imported specifically for you from Vienna. I had them create a blend for you. Vier, go track down some coffee for Miss Linnea. I'll leave you awhile, I know how you get lost in your work."

><br> "Mmmhmm," she said absently, barely hearing him, already absorbed in Epyon.

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> Quatre couldn't stop thinking about Linnea. He couldn't believe what a mistake he'd made in trusting Linnea's feelings and happiness to someone else. He had failed her and now she was lost, as lost as Trowa must have been in space. He had only wanted to do the right thing by keeping his love a secret from her, but she must have figured it out. And that had somehow turned her away from him. He wished he knew what had happened, but Duo wasn't talking and Linnea was nowhere to be found. <br>

> He had pledged to protect the Cing Kingdom, he believed totally in Miss Relena's dream of absolute pacifism. There was no reason for people to fight. But when his commitment was over he would find Linnea, someday. And this time he wouldn't stay in the background of her life. Duo had apparently given up on her, this time he would be free to try and convince her to love him back. Maybe he should have told her how he really felt, but it was too late now. But, it didn't matter what she did, she would always be Linnea, the girl who had literally dropped from the sky and into his life, the girl he would always love.<br>

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> Hilde leaned her chin on her hand and looked out the window of her apartment. It was still hard for her to believe she might never see Duo Maxwell again. He hadn't said it in so many words, but she knew he had gone to be with that mysterious girlfriend of his. She sighed and wondered if that nameless girl, that he had actually only mentioned that once, knew how lucky she was, if she could really appreciate how wonderful Duo was. "If only I had met him first," Hilde thought to herself. He had obviously liked her and found her attractive, if only he weren't attached to someone else.<br>

> Her heart skipped a beat as she saw a boy on the corner in a black jacket. For a moment it looked like he could almost be Duo. But of course he wasn't. She thought back to the moment they had almost kissed, remembered how her lips had tingled in anticipation of a kiss from him. Hilde touched her fingers to her cheek on the place his lips had actually landed. Well, a kiss on the cheek was better than nothing.<br>

> Maybe someday she'd see him again. Stranger things had already happened. And this was a war, things were certain to change. She herself had already changed so much. No, she wouldn't give up on him. She had a feeling it just couldn't be over between them. <br>

>TO BE CONTINUED . . . Next time on Love is a Battlefield . . . Hilde and Duo are reunited . . . Linnea tests Epyon and sees her true enemy . . . <br>> <p><p>

## 2. Love is a Battlefield, Chapter 2

LOVE IS A BATTLEFIELD

><br>By Midii Une

>(formerly YamchaOtaku)<br>

>. . . after Returning Favors<br>

>Author's Note: Finally I'm getting Zechs-sama into this story! Noin jumps up and down and does a little happy dance . . . then starts a cheer GIMME A Z . . .<br>

><br>CHAPTER TWO

><br>

> He was Milliardo Peacecraft. Zechs Merquise was no more. Yet sometimes it was hard for him to discern who was the better man. At least Zechs had been a loyal and talented soldier. Milliardo was nothing but a tormented man. His soul was tormented by the things Zechs had done as well as the things that had happened to him when he was but a small boy. Yet, hadn't those things that happened been what had created Zechs Merquise?<br>

> He leaned back in the deep chair, drumming the tips of his long, aristocratic fingers together. His long pale hair gleamed against the faded brown leather of the chair in unearthly fashion in the dim light of the room. He no longer deserved the Peacecraft name, yet he was no longer Zechs. It was as if he was waiting for something to show him who he was, what he should do, what direction his future should take. He had had that once. Someone who had told him what to do for so long, someone who had combined the commanding presence of a superior officer with the strong but subtle tug of deep friendship. Treize Khushrenada.<br>

> He continued to sit silently, deep in thought. Thinking of those he had called his friends and the girl who was his only family. Milliardo was alone now, although once he had been the hero of OZ, the closest friend of Treize Khushrenada and the inspiring leader that the troops would be only too happy to perish for. He thought of Otto and Walker and all the men who had died for him. And of all of them there was really only one who knew him, maybe even better than he knew himself. Noin. He never called her Lucrezia, although the name fit her confident, strong beauty. She was always Noin to him, a leftover habit from their academy days when last names were de rigueur.<br>

> His thoughts were interrupted by an incongruous voice that shattered the vision of his comrade, his friend, the one that meant more to him than he could ever let her know. <br>

> It was Howard, the Gundam technician he had so fortuitously come across. "That suit's ready for a spin whenever you're ready," the bearded man announced. Milliardo rose slowly and walked out into the hangar. He fixed his ice-blue gaze on the Wing Zero.<br>

> "Soon," he said. "Soon."<br>

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> Lucrezia Noin planted her hands on the stone railing of the balcony outside the music room of the palace of the Cinq Kingdom and leaned forward a little. She gazed at the black velvet sky with its diamond pattern of stars and colonies as if she could find something precious there. Violin music wafted out into the quickly cooling night air. The music touched her so that she could almost feel it caress her

heart as the air was caressing her face and brushing back her hair.

<br>

> The music perfectly expressed what her heart was urging her to do. Her heart was telling her to leave the Cinq Kingdom, find Zechs. She felt he needed her somehow. That he was on the verge of doing something that would adversely affect his life and therefore hers. But she couldn't leave, not when he had asked her to stay. Asked her to care for his sister Relena, to care for the Cinq Kingdom. He wanted her to give herself over to protecting a dream of his that he no longer felt worthy of dreaming, but loved nonetheless. Still the feeling persisted, pulling her painfully in two directions at once.<br>

> There was a good reason that the music of the violin touched her heart and matched her feelings so neatly. The musician was feeling the same emotions that Noin was. He should drop everything and find Linnea and somehow convince her to come back to the desert where he could hide her from war and pain and danger. Quatre thought that he would promise anything to make her come back. Promise never to mention love, promise never to look at her with his heart in his eyes, promise to only be her friend. If only she would let him back into her life, let him protect her again.<br>

> A movement caught his attention in a corner of the room. It was only Miss Noin, she had come in from the balcony and closed the french doors. She was leaning against the wall with her eyes closed and her arms folded. She looked somehow as if she was thinking about someone, someone she cared about as much as he cared about Linnea.<br>

> She glanced over at him as he continued to play. How could he know? How could he know so perfectly how she felt? His empathy with her was so deep it bordered on the uncanny. And then she knew. They were two people, two very different people. But they shared the same deep pain, the pain of unanswered love.<br>

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> Linnea's hand tugged impatiently at the fall of lace at the collar of her blouse and she sighed a little as the neck fell open a little. Gen. Treize insisted on appropriate attire for all members of the Treize Faction and she wanted to please him, but as soon as he was out of sight Linnea would shrug off the jacket and open her collar and go happily back to her work. She unconsciously ran a hand over the top of her head loosening her perfectly pulled back hair and a few strands fell forward over her face.<br>

> Epyon was nearing completion, she glanced at it towering over her from a dark corner of the hangar. A shiver went through her as she looked at it, whether from anticipation of the Gundam's completion or from a touch of disbelief that it had actually sprung into existence from her design she couldn't tell. Hadn't she once thought it should never be constructed? It was difficult to remember why she had thought that now. She was almost too tired to think, so she refilled her coffee cup and let her thoughts wander a bit as she watched the curls of steam rise up. For some strange reason she thought suddenly of Quatre. Most of the time now her heart and mind were sealed off from the painful memories of her former allegiances, her former love, her friends. It was a combined result of being engrossed in her project and an inner defense mechanism to block out things that were too painful to bear. But something about Quatre stuck with her, had anchored itself in the back of her consciousness. Would she be here right now if she had only talked to him before running blindly from the Cinq Kingdom? She blinked a little, trying to shake the feeling and continued to stare at the swirling steam.<br>

> "Ma'am," Officer Vier said, pulling her attention from her

thoughts.<br>

> "Yes," she said absently. <br>

> "The technicians wanted me to inform you that the Epyon is prepared for the virtual reality simulation. Shall I contact Gen. Treize?" he said. He resented her for taking his place but he couldn't help admiring her genius and her beauty. Without the jacket he could see the shape of her body through the thin white blouse she wore and his eyes went to the open collar that gave him a peek of even more. The loose hair around her face tempted him to brush it aside for her. But she paid no attention to anyone but the General and there seemed to be an unspoken order that Miss Linnea was off limits.<br>

> "No, no," Linnea said tersely, downing her coffee in a quick gulp and jumping out of her chair, barely favoring him with a glance. "His Excellency will be here soon anyway. I always do the first tests on my mobile suits. It's a personal tradition. What kind of combat program is available? Epyon needs a worthy opponent."<br>

> "Gen. Treize has obtained data on the Mercurius and Vayeate Ma'am, but I don't think you . . ." Vier started, wondering why he was trying to tell her anything. When had she ever taken his or anyone's advice when it came to Epyon? She thought she knew it all.<br>

> "Don't be ridiculous," she snapped, tired but anxious to move the project along. "I am a more than adequate pilot and it is just a simulation Vier. It would be a foolish waste of time to try Epyon against anything less."<br>

> She positioned herself in the cockpit and closed the hatch. The instruments lit up and Vier's image appeared on the screen. "The program will start with a mobile doll attack and then proceed to the arrival of the two Gundams. Are you sure we shouldn't wait for the General?"<br>

> "Just start the simulation," she said sharply. She was anxious to test Epyon's power and there was something else. The Gundam pilots had said the Zero system showed you the face of your enemy. And she desperately wanted to know who her enemy was. <br>

> The mobile suit performed magnificently, even though the cockpit wasn't designed for her she felt like she was invincible as the mobile dolls surrounded her and disintegrated easily under the fire of her weapons. A wonderful feeling of elation swept through her. She was untouchable and her enemies didn't have a chance. Epyon was all-powerful. She smiled grimly and continued. Suddenly Mercurius and Vayeate appeared. The engineer in her gave them a quick study and she found them wanting compared to her own creation. Still, perhaps together . . . then, don't let them work together. An impulse shot through her brain. And Epyon's heat buster rifle evaporated Vayeate. One on one now, how do you like that, Linnea said aloud as the Zero system started to take her over.<br>

> Treize had come in and was watching in the control room. He was a little surprised that she was so brutal, but then she had always said that Epyon had almost too much power. To match it against the inferior mobile dolls, machines without human influence would produce such an effect. Epyon was more than he dreamed, if even Linnea, who was a far cry from a professional mobile suit soldier was destroying OZ's mobile dolls so efficiently and seemingly without effort . . .<br>

> Then it happened. She was battling Mercurius, slowly, inexorably overpowering the other Gundam, when her mind seemed to separate itself from her body and she wasn't the pilot anymore. She was observing the battle from a distance. <br>

> She heard a voice. "Go ahead Linnea, knock yourself out. Build the best Gundam there ever was and if it comes against me I'll destroy it . . .<br>

> And Epyon was battling DeathScythe. Only Linnea could have produced such a perfect simulation of the battle without a program, using only the darkest, most horrible fears in her subconscious. She had created them both.<br>

> From the outside, it appeared that she had suddenly increased power and destroyed Mercurius. But she kept fighting as if there was something else there, an even more powerful foe that pushed Epyon to its limits.<br>

> "What's going on?" Treize asked Vier. "Is there a discrepancy between what we're seeing and what she's seeing?" <br>

> Vier shrugged, her mind always seemed to be going at a totally different frequency than his and he didn't know what the hell she was up to. Showing off he supposed.<br>

> She watched the battle as if watching a dream. She didn't know where it was taking place or why. Duo was the superior pilot but Epyon was the more powerful Gundam. And the Epyon destroyed DeathScythe. The Linnea that was observing the battle was speechless with disbelief, unable to scream or cry. Then the Epyon's cockpit opened and the pilot hopped out and landed lightly on the ground. The pilot walked over to the fallen mobile suit and pulled off her protective helmet, tossing it to the ground. The pilot's hair was blonde and wavy and she shook it out and ran her hand through it casually. She nudged the DeathScythe with the tip of her boot and said, "Poor Duo. I guess there was still room for improvement."<br>

> Linnea turned around and faced her alter-ego. "You see," she said to herself. "You see, the enemy is you. You'll destroy everything you touch, everything you ever loved or cared about. You are your own enemy . . ."<br>

> A spinning flash of light and she was back in the cockpit. Her eyes were wide and staring. "You are your own enemy . . .," she repeated softly, over and over and her hand reached for the self-detonation device.<br>

> A bright red light in the corner of the hangar sparked into life. "My God," Vier muttered. "She's trying to self-detonate. What is going on in there?" An orange light on the control panel flashed, and a mechanical voice kept repeating self-detonation control currently disabled--self-detonation control currently disabled--self-detonation control currently disabled-- as in the cockpit Linnea pressed the button again and again.<br>

> Treize's image appeared on the communication screen, but she stared through it unseeing and unhearing as he called her name. Tears of frustration welled up in her eyes and she tightened her grip on the self-detonation device willing it to work. Epyon had to be destroyed. She had to be destroyed.<br>

> "Get her out of there now," Treize ordered, wondering what could have gone wrong. They opened the hatch manually but the technicians couldn't pry her hand off the device and she stared right through them as they tried. Finally Treize climbed up. "Linnea?" he said, shocked by her appearance, her white face and her empty eyes that didn't seem to see him. He slid his hand under hers and pried it off the self-detonation control. She seemed to look at him then.

Relieved, he cupped her face in his two hands. "What happened," he asked. "Duo," she said, not seeing Treize, but someone else. "Duo I'm sorry. It was just one kiss. I wouldn't be here if I didn't want to be. You're the one I love . . . Duo." Her eyes met his. "I killed him," she whispered. "I am the enemy." And then she fainted.<br>

> He looked at her curiously. It seemed he had her body and mind but he still didn't have her heart. She reminded him of Zechs Merquise suddenly. He had believed his victory was perfect but the deep

emotions of the past had overridden Zechs' loyalty to him. Would Linnea be the same? She moaned a little in his arms and he told Vier to get a doctor. He pulled her close against him once they were alone and looked over the top of her head at Epyon. He was almost afraid of what it would show him, when his time came.<br>

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> Her heart jumped as a hand touched her shoulder.<br>

> "Need some help there?" a familiar voice asked. Hilde looked up in happy disbelief to see Duo looming over her as she struggled to change the flat tire on her motorcycle. Changing a motorcycle tire was even more difficult than changing a car tire. She had felt hot, tired and overwhelmed but that all changed when she saw his face.<br>

> "Duo," she said. "I've never been so happy to see anyone in my whole life. How in the world did you end up back here?" <br>

> He had to admit to himself that he was happy to see her too. She always made him feel that everything was right with the world somehow. Being with her gave him a glimpse at normalcy. Duo had been back for a couple of weeks now but he had avoided Hilde. He knew there had been the beginnings of something more than friendship between them and that was something he couldn't face right now. He didn't have to be faithful to Linnea anymore. But he wasn't sure he wanted to leave her behind, find someone else and forget she had ever existed. But, he had loved her. No, he did love her. Oh shit, he didn't know what he felt. All that he knew for sure was he never wanted to hurt Hilde, never wanted anything or anyone to hurt Hilde, the way he had hurt Linnea. He didn't want to see Hilde's eyes ever looking at him like that, filled with pain and shock. But he couldn't help wanting to be with her, to have some sort of relationship with her, even if it was only friendship.<br>

> Hilde studied his face and sensed something had changed about him. Her only wish had been that he would come back, that she would see him again. But what if that wasn't enough? She wanted to ask what had happened on Earth, why he had come back alone? But although he wore his habitual grin and his eyes shone with obvious happiness to see her, she instinctively knew that she shouldn't ask.<br>

><br>TO BE CONTINUED . . .

><br>Next time on Love is a Battlefield . . . Will Duo break his rules concerning Hilde? . . . What exactly does Epyon show Treize?

> <p><p>

### 3. Love is a Battlefield, Chapter 3

Author's Note: Sorry this took so long, suffering a little writer's block and holiday hangover. But here you go and there's a little something in here for all you Duo/Hilde fans!! Actually not much happens, this turned out to be a chapter all about inner feelings . .

.><br>Love is a Battlefield

><br>by Midii Une

><br>Chapter Three

><br> It wasn't the same this time, Hilde thought despondently. Duo didn't seem to be as comfortable with her, it was as if he was trying to keep his distance. The last time, although there had never been anything actually physical between them, there had definitely been affection, the ease of friendship and he had always touched her. That was the kind of guy he was. He was a physical person, he was constantly making contact, whether it be a pat on the arm or a gentle

squeeze before bedtime or a mischievous tousling of her short, dark hair. It had seemed as if they were living together. And now it was if he was simply staying here.

><br> She missed the little things that had used to bother her. The rubber bands from his hair everywhere, getting stuck in her vacuum cleaner belt. Finding his white collars in the most unusual places from under the couch to inside the medicine cabinet and always, always left on the kitchen counter and getting in her way when she tried to cook. Not to mention he never put the toilet seat down. But now he was unnaturally neat, as if he was trying not to be a bother. And worst of all he was careful never to touch her.

><br> "Oh Duo," Hilde thought. "Why are you afraid to get close to me now?"

> <br> She looked at the sleeping boy on the sofa and despite her concern she couldn't help but smile as she sipped slowly at a cup of hot tea and picked at a cinnamon roll. Duo must really be tired if the warm smell of cinnamon rolls hadn't woken him up, it usually worked like a charm every time. But he loved to sleep and he looked so adorable with a pillow clutched tightly to his chest with one arm and the other flung over the side of the couch. He had undone his braid, which was unusual. He'd have tangles when he woke up, she thought. But she let her eyes linger on his loose hair. The sun coming through the blinds touched strands of it and emphasized the glossy highlights. He moved a little in his sleep and she sighed, wishing she dared to go and touch his hair, smooth the pillow creases on his face. Dared to touch her lips to his and tell him how she felt. But then he might leave and she'd be worse off than she was now . . .

><br> . . . Was this a dream, he thought vaguely, as he twisted restlessly on the couch. It sure was a boring one. Another echoing, cavernous hangar. A mind-numbing, repetitive meeting where the topic was always the same and always unresolved. Probably that was because there was no right answer. He never joined in unless they asked him directly and his answer was always the same. He would fight on alone.

><br> Duo studied the somber men from his seat in the shadows. He wondered why he came to these meetings. He never learned anything. He leaned back in his chair in the darkness, crossed his legs, folded his arms and tipped his hat over his eyes which blinked heavily. He hadn't been sleeping well since returning to space . . .

><br> He felt her hand run through his hair, smoothing it carefully and her fingertips trailed down his cheek, lingering gently on his face. His hand automatically came up and caught hers. He would hold on to her this time, keep her with him and never let go.

><br> "Duo," her voice whispered, softly and urgently, placing her other hand on his face and making him look at her. She looked him directly in the eyes. "Please," she said. "I know this is the way. Come back to me. Fight with me . . . please."

><br> He could see in her eyes that she believed she was doing the right thing, believed it with all her heart. But he knew that she was wrong. She was so wrong. Couldn't she see ahead? Couldn't she see that the future would be no different from the past if the Treize Faction won? There would be no peace only the constant threat of dictatorship and more battles.

><br> She leaned forward as he hesitated and pressed her lips to his. He kissed her back, but he was kissing Linnea goodbye.

><br> "I can't," he told her finally. "I'm sorry baby. I can't. I'll fight on alone."

><br> She shook her head and pulled her hand from his effortlessly even as he tried to tighten his grip. She turned and ran out of the

hangar and he couldn't make a move to stop her.

><br> It was so real. The fluorescent lights, the mobile suit parts, the grit on the floor and the smell of oil and propane.

><br> A voice broke into his dream. "You're not alone. I'm here with you. I'll always be here."

><br> He woke with a start to see Hilde bending over him, shaking him gently.

><br> "Are you alright?" she asked with a worried look on her face.

"You were saying something in your sleep."

><br> Duo rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand and tried to grin at her. "It was nothing," he said trying to convince himself of that as well as her. "Must have been that movie we watched last night.

Hey, you did save me some cinnamon rolls didn't you?"

><br> She laughed at him as he gulped down the remaining rolls for breakfast and then used the spatula to scrape every crumb out of the pan. This was the Duo she had missed, the Duo she loved.

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><br> He looked down at her lying there and when he put his hand near her face to brush back her hair he could feel feverish heat rising up.

><br> There was a knock on the door, but she didn't stir and he didn't want to be disturbed. It had been 36 hours since he pulled her out of that cockpit and it seemed like she was purposely hiding in unconsciousness. Afraid to wake up. The clinical diagnosis was exhaustion, overwork and hallucinations, probably due to too much caffeine. He had believed it, until he had tried the mobile suit himself because she was still such a child in so many ways.

Forgetting everything, including eating and sleeping, in her excitement over the project.

><br> Her failed project. Or was it he who had failed? His own failure was such an alien concept that it was hard for him to grasp. But it was true. He could not pilot Epyon. But, to be fair, he wondered if anyone could. Could one of the Gundam pilots handle it? More importantly could HER pilot handle it. Duo Maxwell. She'd said she loved him. He had been surprised that that fact bothered him. Made him admit that he, himself, cared for her deeply. And if they could withstand this attack and she could regroup from her encounter with the Zero System he had a project for her. A project that would help him recover the beauty of war. A project to build a mobile suit that represented all the glories of single combat. Then he'd recover his honor again . . . could banish the visions of Epyon, visions of his own death.

><br> The knock came again and he rose to open the door.

><br> "It's a Gundam, Gen. Treize sir," the officer said. "It's joined the battle. Fighting against Romefeller."

><br> He glanced at Linnea and saw her hand clench shut.

><br> Duo Maxwell, he thought. It took you long enough. Aloud he said, "Is it 02?"

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> <br> Deep in space she slept as if under some evil enchantment.

><br> But part of her was still aware.

><br> Aware that he needed her.

><br> Mr. Treize.

><br> All the military trappings of her life were stripped away and she lay in the bed with her long brown hair streaming softly over the white, crisp pillowcase. There was only the essence of herself, far below the surface of her regulated breathing and her closed eyes. The staff wondered if there was anyone really still there, inside the badly injured body that stubbornly clung to life with a powerful

determination they rarely saw.

><br> There were actually brief times when Lady Une's vital signs jumped a little. Brief times when she approached lucidity and cursed herself for being unable to wake up, because that meant she was failing His Excellency.

><br> But most of the time she was only able to lie there as visions of Treize played over and over in her mind. A shining example of perfection in everything he did. And she would do anything to maintain that perfection. Dishonor must never touch him. She would take it all upon herself, even commit murder, so that he could achieve his goals.

><br> Treize. Tall, confident, charming, sophisticated and so handsome that every man she'd ever seen seemed pale and dull in comparison. His goals were her reason for living. She did not even presume to hope for his love or even his touch. It was enough that he allowed her to be a presence in her life. And when those occasional touches did come . . . her body would tingle and her mind would feel confused. Treize.

><br> Of course there were many women who aspired to be more in his life. She had seen them at gatherings and receptions, clustering around him. She scoffed at them. Treize might have lovers but they meant no more to her or to him than his momentary enjoyment of a flower or a particularly beautiful operatic measure. He was a man who enjoyed all the pleasures of life: power, beauty, passion, war, music, nature. But she had lost all sense of wanting anything for herself. Everything she wanted, she wanted for Treize. Only her love for him was pure and no one could love him as she did, with a single-minded heart.

><br> And now he needed her. She sensed that. But she was too far away and too incapacitated to be of any help. She struggled to come awake but the damage done was too great, it was too soon. She fell back into insensibility again. Back into her dream world of Treize.

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><br> Treize Khushrenada stared into the green eyes of Epyon. Seeing again the visions of his death and his final legacy. How ironic that his final legacy would be peace and an end to battles. He who loved the beauty of a battle between two strong foes, the purity of war, the attainment of power.

><br> Nothing was happening as he had envisioned it. Epyon had shown him things he didn't want to see. And for the first time in his life he was struck with a sense of despair, a feeling that he was unfit to lead.

><br> Could Heero Yuy do any better? For it was the Wing pilot and not Duo Maxwell who had come. Another disappointment, he'd thought Linnea would have inspired more devotion in her former lover. Still, a Gundam pilot was a Gundam pilot and Heero Yuy was the most infamous of them all. He would offer him the chance to pilot Epyon and see if he was brave enough to change his own vision of the future, to end his existence here and now and let Earth and the colonies decided their own fates.

><br> And he was glad that Lady Une, his beloved lady, was not here to see him as he was now.

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><br> Duo chewed on the tip of his pen. I'll just make a few rules for myself, he thought. Then things will be fine. Nothing will get out of hand and we can just be friends.

><br> Ooookay.

><br> Rule 1 -- Don't look directly at her for too long (a vision of her dark hair, the color of the ocean at midnight, contrasting with

her soft pale skin, distracted him for a moment but he shook it off.) Rule 2 -- Don't accidentally brush against her like you've been doing (he felt again the smooth texture of her skin and the clean smell of the soap she always used). Rule 3 -- Do most of the talking yourself. That sexy, husky voice of hers is enough to drive you crazy (he thought what it might be like to hear that voice close to his ear, whispering his name as he made love to her). Rule 4 -- Do NOT imagine what it might be like to kiss her, to really kiss her (and he imagined just that, his lips brushing hers softly and the feel of her body contouring itself to his).

><br> "Damn," the God of Death cursed, crumpling the piece of notebook paper into a tiny ball. "This is definitely not helping."

><br> There was a knock on the bathroom door. "Duo! Are you ever coming out?," Hilde asked. "Don't you want to go have lunch in the park?"

><br> She noticed that he looked a little sheepish as he finally exited the bathroom. "Just having a few problems, with my, umm, with my . . . hair. Yeah," he said.

><br> It was a beautiful day. Little white clouds hovered under the canopy of the colony and the artificial sunlight seemed almost real. You could almost forget there were battles being fought somewhere, Duo thought.

><br> He looked over at Hilde. She was just so damned cute, he thought. There was a little bit of juice from the peach she was eating at the corner of her mouth and he couldn't resist reaching out to brush it off for her. Really, he thought to himself, that was all he meant to do. But once his hand touched her velvety cheek he forgot his self-imposed rules concerning Hilde. His fingers brushed her face softly and she shut her eyes and leaned toward him invitingly.

><br> Finally.

><br> Finally, he was going to kiss her, Hilde thought and a shiver of delight ran through her, raising goosebumps on her arms. All it took was a slight movement forward and they were kissing, actually kissing. The touch of his lips on hers was so soft and uncertain at first but she let her mouth open a bit under his and he put his arms around her and pulled her closer. Ohh, she thought, he tastes just like those strawberries he was eating, so sweet.

> <br> He kept one arm around her shoulder and let his other hand wander down her back until he could slide his hand into the back pocket of her jeans. She leaned forward a little more and he lay down on the blanket pulling her down on top of him. As his tongue explored her mouth he thought how much she tasted like a peach, (or did peaches taste like Hilde he joked to himself). She was sweet, but a little tangy too. He liked how she tasted. He liked it a lot.

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><br>To be continued . . .

> <br>

>Next time on Love is a Battlefield . . . God help me, but I don't know!!! Death to evil writer's block!! Actually, Treize takes over the world. Mwahahahaha . . .<br>

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#### 4. Love is a Battlefield, Chapter 4

Author's Note: What a relief. Finally, it's Chapter 4. I'm going on vacation for awhile but look for more in early August. Please read and review!!

><br>  
>Love is a Battlefield<br>by Midii Une  
><br>Chapter 4  
><br> Linnea sat straight up, heart racing with adrenaline and her breathing heavy and labored. The sounds of battle had been like a lullaby, the distant sounds of explosions cushioning her reality as she slept off the effects of the Zero System.  
><br> But now it was silent.  
><br> And she was alone.  
><br> Epyon.  
><br> Oh, what had she done? She yanked back the sheets and stumbled out of bed, dizzy from the fever and being unconscious for so long. For how long she didn't know. She clutched the window sill so hard that her nails scratched the varnish in the polished wood.  
><br> Destruction everywhere.  
><br> Smoking ruins of mobile suits everywhere.  
><br> Dead soldiers everywhere.  
><br> She tried to blink these visions away but they were still there when she opened her eyes. All destroyed as if some mighty hand had descended from heaven and crushed it all. No, not from heaven. Epyon was something out of the depths of hell. She tried again to block it out by shutting her eyes tightly but she was overwhelmed by memories of a nightmare so real that she was forced to open them again to escape it.  
> <br> Then she realized something.  
><br> It was gone. No longer there. The battle here was over, so it had gone on. To vent its destructive nature elsewhere.  
><br> "I'm thinking about it as if it's something alive," she thought to herself. "Am I losing my mind?"  
><br> Her teeth chattered and she wrapped her arms around herself. She sat there alone on the floor beneath the window as the realization dawned on her that she had made an awful mistake. One that she could never rectify.  
><br>\*\*\*\*\*  
><br> There was still so little she really knew about Duo, Hilde thought as she sat in the park waiting for him to come out of one his meetings. She'd believed all her dreams would come true if he finally kissed her. But this wasn't the movies and this wasn't a romance novel. This was real life. And he was still haunted by something, something he wasn't willing to discuss with her.  
><br> That kiss had proved one thing however. She loved him. She really loved him and she would do anything to prove that to him. Oh Duo, she thought, shutting her eyes and remembering the feel of his lips on hers and the breathless way she had felt when he touched her.  
 . . .  
><br>\*\*\*\*\*  
><br> Linnea pulled the brush slowly through her hair, pulling painfully on a tangle she couldn't quite reach. It was difficult to put your hair up without looking in the mirror, but that was something she was reluctant to do these days. She put down the brush and bit her lip thoughtfully. For the first time in so long she had no purpose in life. Where should she go? Back to the colony? She had nothing there. And since the Epyon disaster she didn't belong here either. She spent her time looking out the window, watching as people put their lives back together in the aftermath of battle.  
><br> She sighed and picked up the brush again. She asked herself where she would go, what she would do if she could have any one wish, change the past. Immediately she thought of Duo but that vision was shattered by a memory of his eyes. The look in his eyes the last time she'd seen him. Not even a magical wish could erase that. Every good

memory ruined by that one awful look. From somewhere deep inside another memory came. A memory of bright sun and dry air. Waves of shimmering heat rising up from a vista of endless sand. A pair of sky-blue eyes. And he had loved her. Could she have ever loved him back, she wondered. Quatre . . .

><br> Linnea rubbed her hand tiredly over her eyes. Stop torturing yourself with these foolish dreams. You made your choice already. You made your choice . . .

><br> "Linnea?" a voice, smooth and cool, interrupted her thoughts. And just in time, she thought, dreams like those can only drive you crazy. This is the reality of my life, the rest is gone.

> <br> "You're feeling better," he stated, almost as if it was an order. She hadn't seen Treize, really seen him, since before she tested Epyon.

><br> She nodded slowly, not looking at him. She didn't think he was the type to tolerate failure. And Epyon had been a major failure, there was something so wrong about it, even though she had calculated everything correctly.

><br> "There's something I need to discuss with you," he said.

><br> And she thought, he's going to make me leave. She didn't know how that made her feel now. There was a time when the thought of his rejecting her would have hurt, but now all her feelings were dull, as if they were stored somewhere far away.

><br> "If I asked you," he said. "Would you build another mobile suit?"

><br> She shook her head, almost afraid. "I don't think I ever could again, Your Excellency," she whispered, looking away.

><br> "What I have in mind," he said, seeming to ignore her protest, "would be a mobile suit to restore the beauty and honor of battle. A mobile suit that would be superior to all others in one on one combat. I am going to engage in a duel Linnea. A duel to save the Earth."

><br> He told her about the fall of the Cinq Kingdom and Relena's accession to the post of head representative of the Romefeller Foundation. Linnea was shocked. Both by the destruction of the Cinq Kingdom and by what Relena had chosen to do.

><br> "She can't lead the World Nation to peace now, however," Treize said. "Zechs knows that there must be a final battle, if there is ever to be peace. And I must be the one to give it to him."

><br> He tilted her face up to his and looked at her. Saw that she was tormented as he was by the visions of Epyon. "If we do this thing. If you create this suit, it will be like atonement," he said.

><br> She nodded, understanding. "I'll try," she whispered and picked up the brush again.

><br> "Your beautiful hair," he said, running his hand over the tangled mess she'd made of it. He took the brush from her and gently undid the tangles. He reached for a ribbon and tied it back softly from her face. Like everything he did, it looked perfect. Too perfect. He remembered when he had first seen her at OZ headquarters, the first time he asked her to build a mobile suit. How she had looked, brave and frightened and more than one hair out of place. He reached out and pulled a few hairs loose. That was better, perhaps he had changed her too much.

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><br> Quatre lay on a bunk on the Peacemillion. He worried about Miss Noin. It was Milliardo Peacecraft that she was in love with he knew. How could she stand the knowledge of what he was doing? He admired the depth of her love and the fact that despite that she was still

helping them. She was such a good person. He wished there was a way he could spare her from this heartache. But there was no way to that.

><br> He felt a measure of peace himself. Trowa was alive. He wasn't the same, but he was going to fight with them. Linnea had been right, he had survived. Trowa had done it. Did that mean he was forgiven for what he had done under the influence of the Zero System, in the throes of grief for his father?

><br> Things were coming to a head. One way or another it was all going to be over soon. He got up and looked out an observation portal. He could see the Earth. She was down there he knew. Linnea. He had hope, since Trowa was alive, anything was possible. He lay back down and closed his eyes, remembering everything about her, every kiss on the cheek and touch of the hand they had ever shared. He fantasized that he had kissed her that night on the piano bench when she'd been so sad. If only he had, if only he had the real memory of what it was like to kiss Linnea . . .

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><br> On the other side of the wall, Duo lay awake too. He couldn't sleep, there were so many thoughts running through his head. Thoughts of Hilde back on the colony. He'd said good-bye again without telling her how he really felt. Memories of her kisses and her very presence in his life constantly in his thoughts. And then today, joining up with Quatre again. It was so awkward, with her name unspoken between them.

><br> He supposed Quatre would have told him if she'd changed her mind and come back to the Cinq Kingdom after he'd left. Linnea. What if she had come back, would he apologize? Would she accept it? Was there any future for them at all? He saw her tear-streaked face, heard his own voice telling her that they would be together after the war. But now there was Hilde, so different from Linnea, but the same in some ways. He hadn't made her any promises, but there was a bond between them. Slowly but surely Hilde was taking over his heart, not leaving room for anyone else. But part of him still fought against it, stayed loyal to Linnea. Maybe a little piece of him would always belong to her. And besides, what did he have to offer Hilde, he didn't even know how long he could stay alive in a battle like this.

><br> Romefeller, Treize Khushrenada, OZ, even Relena Peacecraft. It made no difference. The battles weren't ending. The colonies were joining the battle through White Fang and the Gundams were weapons without a mission and more people were being dragged into the conflict. It wasn't just the Gundam pilots fighting the battles anymore. It had to end now. But when it was over, if he survived it, what would he do?

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> Hilde sat on the couch where Duo had slept. She had a big bowl of strawberries, strawberries with sugar and lots of whipped cream. The taste of the strawberries was the taste of Duo. He'd left her again. Left without really saying anything about the future. Yet, she knew he cared about her. She felt again his lips on hers before he left and his hands on her body. He touched her as if he was trying to memorize her feel and shape, as if he might never come back again.<br>

> "Damn you Duo Maxwell," she said out loud. "Why does it have to be you? Gundam pilots aren't the only ones hoping for peace and they don't have to be the only ones to die for it." <br>

> Why was she just sitting there on the couch, eating strawberries and pining for a boy who might never come back? Why wasn't she out

there fighting by his side? Just because he wanted to do it alone, just because he thought he had to be the sacrifice, that he should be the one to fight and everyone else should stay safely at home? No. No way. She could fight. She would fight. She was going to space. She was going to find Duo and never leave his side. Hilde could help and if he died she was going to be right beside him. All the way to the end.<br>

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> Taking over the World Nation from Relena Peacecraft had been ridiculously easy. Her belief in total pacifism had made it so. Still, he had admired her as she left. He knew she was going to Zechs, to Milliardo, to try to stop him in his quest to rid space of the contaminating influence of Earth. Treize knew she would fail, but he admired her for trying. And when the battle was over, then would be the time for Relena Peacecraft. But he wouldn't be here to see it. Epyon had shown him that.<br>

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> "Hey there! Long time no see," a voice casually announced from the communicator screen on the desk.<br>

> That voice. It was one of the oddest voices Linnea had ever heard and she immediately knew who it was. She had spoken to him so many times from the desert base, sharing ideas and getting input on repairs to DeathScythe.<br>

> "Howard? Howard! What are you doing? Where are you? How did you get through the security blocks?" she said, bending close to the screen and barraging the older technician with questions faster than he could answer them.<br>

> He put his hand up to the back of his head and rolled his eyes behind his sunglasses. "Slow down little girl, that's too many questions and we probably don't have much time," he said.<br>

> She nodded.<br>

> "I'm here in space on the Peacemillion and I sure could use your help right now," he said, praying she wouldn't turn off the screen. He sure as hell hoped he had made the right decision in contacting her. Despite what she was doing now he felt deep down she was like him, that she would always feel a responsibility toward the Gundams and their pilots. Especially one . . .<br>

> "I have a project of my own, perhaps you could help me too," she said. "You are familiar with the Tallgees?" <br>

> "The Tallgees is destroyed," Howard said. "Saw it go with my own eyes. So you've got gundanium and you want to rebuild it as a Gundam?"<br>

> "Not enough," she shook her head. "There's a bit left over from the construction of the--of the--the--the Epyon," she stammered slightly. "But not nearly enough to construct the whole MS. What do you think Howard? Should I dilute the gundanium throughout the suit, mix it in with the titanium I have or use the pure gundanium at strategic points?"<br>

> "My vote goes for using the pure stuff at your weak points, Linnea. I suspect you already decided to do that?" he said after a moment of thought.<br>

> "Yes," she agreed. "But it's good to hear you back me up. I'm surrounded by nothing but yes men here and I don't trust their judgment on anything. Not like I trust yours Howard," she added meaningfully. "What do you need?"<br>

> "Well," he said. "I'm about pulling out what little hair I've got left. I'm upgrading Sandrock and DeathScythe for improved fighting in space and I'm trying to round up a suitable MS for Trowa Barton."<br>

> "Trowa!" she said. "He's alive? He's there?"<br>

> "He's a little worse for wear but he's here and he's fighting with us," Howard said. "DeathScythe I know, almost as well as you do, maybe even better. But Sandrock, I could use some help there. Any shortcuts or hints you could give me on increasing its performance would sure be appreciated."<br>

> She was silent a moment, wanting to ask about Duo and Quatre, but unwilling to let herself think of them. Of what had used to be. <br>

> "But basically, the Sandrock and DeathScythe are intact," she ventured. "No major damage?"<br>

> "Depends how you look at it," Howard said, answering her coded question with a coded answer. "Everything seems fine from the outside but sometimes things get shaken up in a battle, things you don't notice from the outside."<br>

> He broke out of the code at the stricken look on her face. "And you? You are alright down there? If you could get up here and help me out personally it would make a big difference. Can you manage it?"<br>

> She shook her head. "I can't leave what I'm doing here unfinished. I have responsibilities I can't leave behind. I made my choice weeks ago. And you're doing fine without me Howard. You're all getting along alright without me," she answered.<br>

> "That may be true, but it would go a hell of a lot smoother with you up here. You belong with us, don't you see," he protested.<br>

> "About your question," she said, ignoring his proposal and cutting him off before he said something she didn't want to hear. "The main wiring in the Sandrock should be basically good for space. It's the connections to the weapons systems you need to work on. Increase the insulation at those points and only give a minimal upgrade to the main wiring. That should speed up the process."<br>

> "Sounds good. The Maganacs did a good job in repairing it after the self-detonation, looks like they used the upgraded specs you left behind," he said.<br>

> "Well, just be careful and don't rush whatever you do," she said, her mind starting to race with thoughts. Detailed images of the Sandrock and it's systems beginning to play in her mind. "Is there anything else?"<br>

> Quatre came in then to check on the progress on Sandrock. He paused in the doorway of the hangar section of the Peacemillion. Howard was in there talking to somebody, but who? Someone on the communications screen. Could it be important, more news about the situation they were in. He glanced at the screen over Howard's shoulder. The technician turned to see who was there, opening up a view of the screen.<br>

> "Quatre!" he said.<br>

> Linnea looked. Tears sprung to her eyes, he was right there behind Howard. She'd thought she would never see him again.<br>

> "Linnea," Quatre whispered. "Oh Linnea." He reached his hand out for the screen and their eyes met for a moment.<br>

> She quickly reached out and pressed the terminate button. The screen went blank. She brushed the tears off her face and quickly installed a block from that initiating point. She couldn't do this. It hurt. It hurt too much. <br>

> "Don't cry. Don't," she whispered to herself furiously. Then buried her head in her arms and let the hot tears fall silently.<br>

> "Howard! Howard, get the connection back," Quatre insisted. "What did she say? Did she contact us? Is she coming back? Howard, get her back on."<br>

> Howard pushed a few buttons then threw up his hands. " I got

through to her. I'd been attempting that for a while. I wanted her input on the Sandrock upgrades. She's blocked us out now though. She's too smart for me. I'll never get back in. But at least I did manage to get some tips from her regarding Sandrock. It'll be ready before you know it now." <br>

> Quatre didn't answer. He put his hand back up to the screen and closed his eyes. He had seen her again. Could almost see an afterimage of her on that screen. So close to talking to her and yet he'd hardly gotten a glimpse. But he knew their eyes had touched, just a moment. <br>

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> "I'll be damned," Howard said, when a few hours later a 40-page document was transmitted to him on the Peacemillion a few hours later. There was no location of origin anywhere on the paperwork. <br>

> The document contained detailed analysis and suggestions for upgrading Sandrock for space. And a short personal message. <br>

> "Sorry we were cut off. I did a bit more thinking about your problem. Hope this helps. By the way, don't forget that after each battle you must recalibrate the cockpit devices in DeathScythe. Your pilot gets a bit too enthusiastic and the systems go all out of wack. Don't forget, you'll need optimum performance with what you'll be up against. LL." <br>

> It was all too obvious to Howard from that message where her heart was and that she still cared a great deal about those two pilots. Why the hell wouldn't she come to space? <br>

> <br> TO BE CONTINUED . . .

><br> Please review!

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## 5. Love is a Battlefield, Chapter 5

Author's Note: Apologies for the hold-up on this part, it's still not flowing like I'd like it to, so please be gentle and stick with me.

But at least it's a really long chapter ^\_~

><br> Love is a Battlefield

><br> by Midii Une

><br> Chapter 5

><br> It had simply been a brief encounter in the battle to end all battles.

><br> She had been through much worse in her career, but it had been a nasty episode by any standards. They were lucky to get out with their lives, she and Duo and Quatre. Gundam vs. Gundam. Lover vs. beloved. Right vs. wrong.

> <br> Noin was shaking. She couldn't stop shaking. She wrapped her arms around herself to stop the tremors that quaked through her body but nothing could stop the shaking. She let her body slide down the wall she was leaning against until she was sitting on the floor in the darkened room.

><br> Zechs was gone.

><br> The Zechs she had known, loved, worshiped. The Zechs she had trusted to always be there, the Zechs she had believed could never betray her or his own ideals. Where was that man now? Was he lost to her forever? He couldn't be. Despite everything she would never give up, never let go of her love for him.

><br> Noin impatiently brushed scalding tears off her face with the back of her hand. She looked at her hand. How many nights had she envisioned him taking her hand in his and drawing her close against him for a kiss, for an intimate embrace? How difficult it was to

conjure up images like that now. Should she see it as a hopeful sign that in the end he hadn't been able to kill her after all? Or was the gesture a final remnant of the chivalrous knight he had always been, a shadow of the courteous tenderness he had always shown to her? Or had he merely forgotten her presence as an adversary in his mad desire to destroy the Gundams, to destroy the Earth?

><br> Sobs wrenched from deep within made her shake even harder as she relived the horrible battle between herself and the one she loved most in this world. The one whose life and dreams meant even more to her than her own did.

><br> "Zechs, oh Zechs," she whispered over and over. As she whispered his name she wondered how long she could hold out on the side of right. How long before she turned from her allies, turned from Quatre and all the rest? How long before she joined Zechs in his insane quest? She knew it was only a question of time. It was impossible to pit herself against the man she loved. It would be easier to plunge a knife into her own heart.

><br> She knew that she would travel to hell with him and even into the mouth of madness. Even if he didn't want her to come along. Her loyalty to him was such that she'd follow him anywhere, commit any crime. Yes, follow him even to hell, even though her heart knew what he was doing was so wrong.

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><br> Hell.

><br> He was in hell and she had created it.

><br> Because he'd dared her to.

><br> Duo saw her face, wet with tears. His face was close to hers, close enough for a kiss.

><br> "Go ahead. Knock yourself out," he said.

><br> "Knock yourself out."

><br> Linnea was nothing if not thorough and efficient. He knew that better than anyone. Knew better than anyone exactly what she was capable of. He could have stopped her.

><br> But he hadn't.

><br> He hadn't counted on Zechs Merquise being the pilot either.

><br> "Build the best Gundam in the world and if it comes against me I'll destroy it."

><br> Yeah.

><br> Yeah, right.

><br> He walked over to his toolbox, the one he'd left with Howard the last time he'd been in North America. He'd been in such a hurry for a mission he'd forgotten it. Duo swallowed and opened the lid for the first time in all those months. It was still there. He'd ripped it out of a yearbook in the school library. A dirty, worn-out scrap of a photograph, he'd carried it in his pocket until it had threatened to disintegrate altogether and then he'd put it in the toolbox. Linnea Lang, the girl most likely to . . . He'd ripped it out quickly while the vigilant librarian's back was turned and the rest of the sentence was missing. He forgot what it had once read.

><br> The girl most likely to break your heart, a voice inside his head prompted.

><br> Howard watched Duo sympathetically as he crouched over the toolbox, still in his spacesuit. Watched him almost toss something in the trash can then change his mind and place it carefully back in the toolbox.

><br> He was motionless for so long that Howard had to go over and see if he had fallen asleep.

><br> "Do you want to talk about it?" he asked the pilot.

><br> Duo shook his head negatively. "No," he choked out. "I'm no good at talking about important stuff."

><br> He visibly shook himself and snapped out of it, a lopsided grin appearing on his face.

><br> "Thanks Howard. Catch'ya later man," Duo said, slapping the older man on the back and leaving the hangar.

><br> "Crazy kids," Howard muttered. He looked at the battered Gundams looming around him in the dark room, surveying the heavy damage.

><br> Everything really had gone crazy, Howard thought to himself. The sudden appearance of the White Fang, Zechs' decision to lead them. How could the man have changed so much, the technician thought. He analyzed all the moments he'd spent with the pilot dubbed the Lightning Count but nothing in those memories gave Howard a clue as to why Zechs was acting the way he was now. When he'd known him so recently he'd been like a lone knight of justice determined to promote peace. But now . . .

><br> And then there was Epyon. A nightmare in Gundanium. Linnea Lang had obviously outdone herself. He wondered how it was possible that something as horrible as that machine could have been brought into existence by the girl he knew. No one had to tell Howard she was smart enough or had the capability, he knew it better than any of them. Only he was technologically advanced enough himself to see her real potential. But there'd been something broken in her eyes when he'd talked to her last. Some hurt that had expressed itself in the Gundam she'd created.

><br> He wondered if all this was happening because it was the only way for the battles to end. He had the feeling Zechs knew that deep down and was sacrificing himself to bring about peace the only way he knew how. Not as a Peacecraft, but as the personification of Vengeance.

><br> "Is that what you're thinking Zechs," Howard wondered. "If so it may be that the threat of White Fang could be just the unifying force the rest of us need to end this war, once and for all."

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><br> Finding Duo on this labyrinth of a battleship was like wandering in a nightmare, Hilde thought as she crept through the quiet, shadowed hallways of the Peacemillion.

><br> She wondered why the security on the ship was so lax. She had boarded the ship without a moment's anxiety. The only dangerous part had been evading the hordes of mobile suits gathering in space.

><br> The World Nation.

><br> White Fang.

><br> Treize Khushrenada.

><br> Milliardo Peacecraft.

><br> All gathering for a monstrous battle. With everything Hilde cared about caught in the middle.

><br> Duo.

><br> The future of the colonies.

><br> Duo. He made the future more important to her than it had ever seemed before. She thought of having a home together, a life together, even children maybe, all the traditional things that had been important to people as long as there had been people. As long as there had been an Earth. As long as there had been war . . .

><br> She slid through the halls unseen, alert for a glimpse of him or the sound of his voice. She knew she must be nearing the hangar area, where he was most likely to be. Just then she caught the sound of his voice. It had the power to make her heart somersault almost

painfully.

><br> "No," she heard him say to someone. "I'm no good at talking about important stuff."

><br> She'd never heard him sound like that, his voice choked and dejected sounding. The voice of defeat. Her heart ached for him and her arms yearned to hold him. But the words themselves rang true. He wasn't any good at talking about the important stuff. Sure, he talked a lot. But despite all the words he managed to say to her, not much of it was ever important or meaningful.

><br> Hilde looked at him from the dark corner of the deserted hallway and her heart dropped as she saw his face lose the carefully placed grin and grow darker than she'd ever seen it. She almost gasped as he appeared ready to punch the wall, but he pulled back at the last moment and walked away.

><br> She squared her shoulders and followed after him. She wasn't going to let Duo go into battle again without letting him know how she felt. Without letting him know she would be beside him.

><br> "Duo . . ." she said tentatively, made suddenly shy by his strange mood.

><br> He rounded on her quickly and she drew back from him involuntarily. In her mind's eye she could see his Gundam whirling to attack, the deathscythe flaring and the eyes of the mecha glaring venomously. And she thought that whoever had built that thing must have known him so well, so intimately.

><br> "Hilde? What the hell are you doing up here," he questioned her angrily. "How stupid can you be?"

><br> She hadn't expected him to be angry, well maybe a little, but certainly not like this. Her wide blue eyes brightened suddenly beneath a film of tears.

><br> "Duo? I-I'm sorry. I had to come. I'm s-sorry. I . . ." she stuttered.

><br> The sudden anger faded from his face and the snapping fire died out of his dark blue eyes as he saw hers fill with tears.

><br> "Oh shit. Shit, Hilde," he said penitently. "Don't cry. I'm sorry. It's just that it's dangerous up here. So dangerous. You shouldn't have come and you have to leave. Leave right now."

><br> He brushed his hand over her pale cheek and pulled her close against him. Duo ran his hand softly through her hair and she pressed closer, breathing him in.

><br> She took a deep breath and said determinedly, "I won't leave."

><br> "Hilde . . ." he said.

><br> "I'm not leaving. I can help. I'm a soldier. A trained soldier. And this group needs all the help it can get," she said firmly, gaining confidence

><br> He couldn't deny that they needed help. But not from Hilde. He tightened his arms around her. Not Hilde.

><br> "Come in here," he said, pulling her into his room. He shed his spacesuit and sat down heavily in a chair. She rubbed his shoulders trying to ease the stress she felt there, the strained tautness that seemed to clutch his whole body. He looked up at her face and saw the determination there. Saw again the intense and determined OZ soldier he had felt so drawn to.

><br> "Think, think what to say," he said to himself. "Don't say the wrong thing now. Not again."

><br> He pulled on her hand until she was sitting in his lap. She wanted to argue with him that she was going to stay but he looked so tired and it felt so perfect to be in his arms, her body molded against his that she kept quiet for a moment. Hilde buried her face in Duo's neck and nuzzled against him. They held each other tightly.

They sat silently like that for a quite awhile.

><br> "Please Hilde," he finally said. "One person more won't make a difference. Please go home."

><br> She jumped out of his arms. Her eyes blazed nearly as fiercely as his had earlier. It may have been awhile but she was a soldier too. She may not be a Gundam pilot but her mobile suit skills had been among the most commendable in her unit. She could make a difference. She would make a difference.

><br> She felt like storming out but one look at his face told her what he was really meaning to say. He was talking to her, really talking to her. Maybe this was their chance to get closer. Hilde knelt down beside his chair and wrapped her arms around him.

><br> "Duo," she said. "Please understand that I want to help and I have to be a part of this. You showed me yourself that this is the right path and now I can't help but follow it to the end. It's dangerous I know, but I couldn't live with myself if I didn't do something for the cause I believe in, the cause we both believe in so much."

><br> He remained silent. Duo knew that she was right. But it was a blood-soaked, no-holds-barred nightmare out there. How could he sit back and watch her fly out into the middle of it? If he had his way it would be only him and DeathScythe against them all. He had always known that was his mission to fight. He fought to keep others from fighting, it had always been that way for him, ever since the massacre at Maxwell Church.

><br> It was morbid but since that day, when so many others had died and he had escaped he'd felt Death was watching over him. That Death was waiting until it was good and ready to come for him and until that time came he was untouchable.

><br> "I might as well be the one to do the dirty jobs," he had thought that then and he still thought that now.

><br> Hilde studied his far away look. He was thinking about his past, she could tell. The past that was such a secret from her.

><br> "Please trust me Duo," she said, pressing her forehead against his lowered head. "Tell me everything about yourself. I've known you for so long and yet I don't really know you at all."

><br> Only Linnea knew much about him and he'd even kept secrets from her, Duo thought. And despite their parting of the ways he knew she'd always keep what he'd told her locked in her heart, a sacred trust he knew she'd never break. He looked at Hilde and thought that every time he opened up to someone it felt so right, but eventually he would lose that person. Like he'd lost Sister Helen, like he'd lost Linnea. They'd known him and loved him and been there for him. It was as if Death had granted him the strength for battle but denied him the peace that came from loving someone and receiving their love in return. He'd always fought so hard, but when it came time to save the ones he loved the most, he'd failed. Failed.

><br> But Duo couldn't deny what he saw in Hilde's eyes. She cared about him, she really wanted to know him, to understand. And maybe he owed her that. She meant so much to him, still he wasn't at all sure what he was going to do about that. But he should tell her, open up to her. At least about some things.

><br> She tightened her arms around him as he began to speak to her about his past.

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> <br> Linnea stared at the calculations and without much hope of changing the outcome she typed the qualifying circumstances concerning the probability of victory of the Tallgees II in again and pressed the enter key. The disk drive churned the information through

the inner mechanisms of the computer and spit out the same results. Probability of victory: LOW.

><br> But that was unacceptable. The Tallgees II was a beautiful and powerful piece of machinery but putting it up against the mobile suits that existed on the battlefield right now was just short of suicidal. Gen. Treize would be better off if he let her upgrade and repair Wing. She glanced over at the damaged Gundam that had been abandoned on the European coastline by Heero Yuy. Yes, that would be the way to go, if only she could convince Treize.

><br> She reviewed in her mind, the arsenal gathered in space. For starters there was Libra, with enough firepower to destroy anything, including the Earth itself. Then there were the upgraded versions of DeathScythe, Sandrock and Shenlong of course. But to her knowledge the 05 pilot was unaccounted for and Trowa's Gundam was also unaccounted for. And then, of course, there was the Epyon of course and its Zero System counterpart the Wing Zero.

><br> It defied imagination that between them she and Quatre had produced the two most horrifying and destructive mobile suits in history. It certainly hadn't been in their minds that morning in the hangar, sitting companionably side by side at her terminal and clicking their coffee cups together. She excused Quatre, he'd had his reasons. He'd been suffering so. But herself she could not forgive and now she was caught in the momentum of doing something nearly as wrong. Sending her pilot out to battle in a suit that had so little chance of success, despite his determination. Linnea thought a moment and then pulled up the repair files she had put together for Wing and gave the order for work to start. She had to make Treize see somehow that it was the right direction to take.

><br> If she'd put the possibility of her chances of convincing him through her computer program she would have received the same answer she received to her earlier question. Probability of victory: LOW.

><br> Linnea steeled herself for disappointment and knocked on Treize's office door softly before entering. She swallowed as she looked at him there, he still had the power to make her tingle, despite herself and thoughts of their few, but memorable, romantic encounters played themselves in her mind as they always did when she saw him. She never knew when his official, professional manner would give way to a burst of passion. It was always a surprise when he'd enter her room in the middle of the night to brush the tip of a rosebud across her cheek and wake her up with passionate kisses. All like a dream, except in the morning the rose would be lying on the pillow beside her. Her thoughts left her unable to say anything at first.

><br> She finally found her voice but without even looking up at her he held up a hand to keep her silent as he continued listening to the angelic voice of an operatic soprano discourse on tragic love. Linnea kept her silence and stared at the carpet as he continued to ignore her presence until the aria came to its heartrending conclusion. Then she heard him tap his pen impatiently on the desk. "Do you have an update on the Tallgees," he prompted her with the question.

><br> "I came to ask you to let me go ahead and upgrade the Wing, Your Excellency," she said, her voice growing more confident as she realized how right she was. He just had to see that. "My calculations have shown that the new MS just doesn't give us the best probability percentages. The Wing is a much better alternative. Please--"

><br> "You misunderstand my objectives," Treize interrupted. "From what I've seen the Tallgees II is perfectly suited for this battle."

><br> He rose from his chair and advanced toward her slowly. For some

reason she felt herself backing away until the wall was at her back and he was closing in on her in a predatory manner.

><br> "One-on-one combat," he murmured softly, raising her chin to look into her face. "One-on-one combat is the only way to find satisfaction."

><br> "But, Your Excellency," she tried again. "Treize. Please listen. I want you--"

><br> He stopped her protests with a kiss. He knew what she meant to say and he knew it was all true, to her way of thinking. But she was incapable of understanding that this time defeating the opponent was not the way to victory. Her analytical mind would not let her see this from his point of view. He felt a bit sorry for her that she could not see the beauty of the upcoming battle, it would be something not to be forgotten.

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><br> She slept beside him restlessly following his little demonstration of the pleasures of one-on-one combat. But Treize could not sleep, it disquieted him to be misunderstood, and despite having closed the subject with her he knew that Linnea still did not believe in what he was going to do. What made her so talented with all things mechanical stopped her from being able to share his dream. She saw it all in terms of power, speed and defensive structures. These things were important of course. But more important to him was the battle, the honor in it and what could be accomplished by it.

><br> Zechs would understand, he thought. But even Treize did not have the audacity to contact his former friend turned enemy for a pre-battle heart-to-heart. The situation was not that civilized, despite the way he wished things to be. But Zechs would accept his challenge to a duel. He could not have changed that much from the man he had known so long.

><br> But there was one other. One who had always understood, or unlike Linnea, she had put up the pretense of understanding and then made it her business to comply. And she was here now, nearby in an infirmary room, back on Earth after the destruction of the Fortress Barge. Talking to Lady Une, voicing his thoughts to her, would set everything back into place in his mind and erase the tiny doubts Linnea's opinions had raised there.

>And even if she couldn't answer him, he would know that he had her support, both in her mind and in her heart.<br>

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> Unlike Treize, Milliardo Peacecraft had no one to discuss his inner turmoil with. He stood before the observation portal on the Libra, his military posture emphasizing his imposing height, his arms folded in an attitude of confidence. From the outside he appeared to be calm, determined and set on his course. But on the inside he was as shaken as Noin was. He had never meant to come up against her. She and Relena were the only loyalties that remained in his heart. Yet today he could have killed them both. He fixed his eyes on Earth. He had to stay strong and focussed, couldn't let any weakness get to him. The weakness that threatened to pour in through the tiny crevices in his armor made by Noin and his little sister. Focus on the purpose, he told himself. Destroy the Earth, the source of all the conflict and then my Father's goals will be realized. <br>

> "I must let nothing stand in my way," he said suddenly, aloud. Not Relena and not Noin, he'd avoid hurting them only if he could do it without compromising his goals. He gazed at the Earth and blocked out everything else.<br>

> Dorothy Catalonia stood in the doorway of the Libra's bridge watching him. She felt an almost sexual thrill as she heard his words. The thrill came not from the beauty of the man her eyes fell

on. But from the cruel note of determination she heard in his voice.<br>

> "Oh," thought Dorothy, clasping her hands together ecstatically. "The battle to come will be the pinnacle of everything and here I am, at the center of it all."<br>

>TO BE CONTINUED . . . Next time on Love is a Battlefield . . . Vier finds out who's sleeping in Treize's bed but Linnea regains the upper hand . . . Hilde discovers a way to make a difference . . . Wufei and Heero reappear from fanfiction no-man's land . . . <p><p>

## 6. Love is a Battlefield, Chapter 6

Author's Note: Not much to say!! Sorry for the delay between chapters and thanks for reading !!!

><br>Love is a Battlefield  
by Midii Une<br>  
>Chapter 6<br>

> <br> What would His Excellency think when he found out that she was going behind his back on so many things, Officer Vier thought. Linnea Lang was not the girl Treize Khushrenada believed her to be. He had discovered that. Discovered her secret transmission to the Peacemillion. It had been encoded but he was an engineer and although he couldn't decipher any details it was obvious she was working with the Gundams again, if indeed she had ever stopped. And she must have her reasons for repairing the 01. The work was slowing down the completion of the Tallgees II, not by much, but it was noticeable to him. Linnea Lang was up to something and when he exposed her she would be gone. Of course he'd thought that after the Epyon incident, but still she was here. Still she was in command of the entire engineering department. Why was it that in Khushrenada's eyes she could do no wrong?

><br> Vier paused outside the office door. He was taking a risk, but surely this information would be the end of Linnea Lang. The door to the office was slightly ajar so he peered in and saw that the General was not at his desk. He'd have to wait, it was early, but the General didn't sleep much so he had to be up and about somewhere and when he came back he'd tell him everything. As he was about to take a seat he noticed that the other door in the office was open a crack. If His Excellency was still sleeping he'd better get out and come back later, he thought. He peered through the door to see if he was in there and what he saw made everything about the past few months fall suddenly into place. He couldn't help opening the door wider and looking again to make himself believe it. He should have figured it out sooner. He worked so hard at things but nothing ever came easily. And he knew now why they came so easily to Linnea Lang.

><br> He was sleeping with her.

><br> Linnea heard a floorboard creak and sat straight up, startled into an alert state by the sound. In an instant she had the gun that always reposed on the nightstand in her hand, with the other she pulled the strap of her amethyst silk camisole up over her shoulder and pushed a few strands of hair behind her ear.

><br> "What the hell are you doing here" she asked, raising the hammer of the pistol before she got a clear look at who was standing there. Treize kept guns around for a reason. Assassination was an ever-present threat. Then she recognized the other engineer and lowered the weapon although she kept a hand on the barrel warily. There was something about Vier, they were always at odds about everything. He never agreed with her on anything from the use of the available Gundanium in the Tallgees to the necessity of making

repairs on Wing.

><br> "You shouldn't be here Vier," she said slowly. She thought for a reason he would possibly come here, to Treize's inner sanctum. "Is something wrong at the hangar? Some emergency?"

><br> "I came to inform His Excellency that you were repairing the 01 without his permission," he said in an accusatory tone. "That's what is wrong at the hangar. It's been wrong since you came here."

><br> "I don't believe Gen. Treize is interested in every little detail of my department," she said, getting out of bed and wrapping herself up in Treize's robe, which hung over a nearby chair. The gesture showed Vier just how comfortable she was in this room, she had been here many times before.

><br> Linnea saw the anger and frustration play over the man's face. She had to nip this in the bud now, she would not tolerate any delays on the Wing repairs. Although Treize had said he would only pilot Tallgees she still hoped to convince him that Wing was the better alternative. He hadn't listened to her last night, but maybe another time he'd listen. At least Wing could be a backup in case of damage to the World Nation's signature suit, the Tallgees. The more functioning mobile suits in their arsenal the better the chances of success. Any schoolchild could tell you that much.

><br> "You're fixing that suit for the Gundam pilots," Vier said, spilling everything he knew. He'd been so primed to reveal her that he couldn't help but let her know that he had discovered all her secrets. "I found your transmission to Peacemillion, you see."

><br> "And exactly what did that tell you?" she asked with confidence she really didn't feel. He was playing a childish game of one-upmanship with her that wasn't helping the situation. They should be combining forces, not bickering over who Treize liked best. That was exactly this man's problem she realized, he didn't like it that she was the better engineer and he was trying to take her out of the picture. She was too young and confident in her own talent to sympathize with what he must be feeling. Too secure in Treize's affections.

><br> He flushed as he realized he didn't know exactly what had been in her transmission and she read that failure on his face.

><br> "I'll tell you then," she said a little vindictively. He was out for her blood after all and she had never done anything to him. "I was merely exchanging ideas with a technician I feel comfortable with. I'm sure Treize would approve of that, he only wants the best on this project. So go ahead and inform him. Of course in exchange I gave my colleague some help with his work on the Gundams. But of course you do know that His Excellency has a certain admiration for those pilots and would have no aversion to my giving them a small piece of advice."

><br> Vier's jaw dropped. She was insulting him, saying that she'd had to contact her former colleagues to get help with the Tallgees. Help he wasn't qualified to give.

><br> "And, while you're at it, I'm sure he'd appreciate hearing how you went through my files without permission as well as entered this room without an invitation. Feel free to tell him all of that Vier," she said.

><br> She had the upper hand again, as always, he thought. He looked at her, so beautiful standing there in a patch of sunlight, the dark blue robe pooling around her on the floor and making her look like a lovely depiction of a medieval saint's statue. So far above him and untouchable. And the glare she gave him said it all. "Go ahead and tell what you know," her look said. "It won't make a bit of difference."

><br> "If I don't say anything . . ." he said.

><br> "Don't interfere with my repairs to the Wing. That's all I ask," she said shrugging. "I have my reasons and they have nothing to do with the Gundam pilots. You have nothing to worry about on that score. Everything I do here I do for His Excellency."

><br> "I won't interfere with you again, Miss Linnea," he said, pulling the door closed behind him. He leaned against it, hate blazing in his eyes. Someday she would be vulnerable and he'd pay her back for this. But that day wasn't now. He walked off with his fists clenched.

><br> Linnea glanced at herself in the mirror. How much she had changed since she'd come to Luxembourg. She was as cold, calculating and imperious as any of General Treize's officers. It was this place, these people. It was like a web of intrigue and you always had to watch that you didn't get caught in it and bitten by the spider. She shuddered at her own imagery, how she hated spiders. She hated this place, why did she stay here she wondered, rubbing her fingers at her temples. Vier had thought she was working with the Gundams. It had been the one thing she had done lately that made her feel some satisfaction in her work. Why did she stay here where she was so out of place? She flopped back down on the bed and her eye caught sight of the little rosebud beside her pillow. She picked it up and looked at it, so perfect. It was so perfectly beautiful. A dreamy look came into her eyes and she rubbed her hands over her arms beneath

> the satin robe. It belonged to him, held her as it held him, carried the soft perfume of rose bath oil. Treize, she thought and the other things she had been wondering and worrying about vanished like a mist.<br>

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> It had reached that point in the story and Duo paused, unable to decide whether to go on. He could just tell Hilde that he'd kinda, sorta picked up DeathScythe somewhere and voila, there he was the OZ pilot. Or he could say that he'd met this girl, and as they'd worked together to build the DeathScythe they'd found themselves falling in love. And then in all the craziness and misunderstandings in this insane war he'd lost her somehow. Saying it would make it so true, but not talking about it didn't change matters either.<br>

> Hilde was the one that had stuck by him for so long and he knew he'd do anything at all for her. But he couldn't help drawing the parallels. The closer he got to Hilde the less he thought about Linnea. Even as he'd helped Hilde realize that OZ was the real enemy, Linnea had been playing her mind games with Treize and losing the battle. Every time he saw Trowa he thought of that. But how could you be angry with a guy who had no memory? Besides it wasn't Trowa's fault, there was no one but himself to blame that she had gone back there . . .<br>

> Hilde looked at him expectantly and a little anxiously. He was going to tell her about that other girl now? What if he said that he was still in love with her? How would she cope?<br>

> "Then I-I met this girl. We felt the same things, we had the same goals," Duo started.<br>

> "What's her name," Hilde asked, trying to stay calm and unaffected by the obvious emotion in his voice.<br>

> "Linnea," he answered. "She, I mean we, ummm--<br>

> Someone was knocking on the door and swung it open without waiting for an answer.<br>

> "Duo? Are you sleeping? A shuttle is coming in. Heero and Wufei are joining us here and . . ." Quatre said, breaking off as he noticed that Duo was not alone.<br>

> Duo almost laughed at the look of shocked surprised on Quatre's

face before the message registered. <br>

> "Hey! That's great news," Duo said. Quatre, however, continued to look at him searchingly. He could hardly believe it was true. Duo had really, truly given up on Linnea. But if he could have seen her face as he had that moment on Howard's screen. She was somewhere out there, so confused and sad and lost.<br>

> He barely heard Duo introduce the girl in his room as Hilde Schbeiker, although he automatically greeted her in his usual polite and friendly way.<br>

> Hilde also barely paid attention as Duo introduced her to the other Gundam pilot. He had come in at such an inopportune moment, just when Duo had been about to tell her something very important. Who knew when they'd get another quiet moment together again, now that the other pilots had arrived . . .<br>

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><br> As the reunited quintet of Gundam pilots greeted and eyed each other with varying emotions of happiness on the part of Duo and Quatre; suspicion and doubt on the part of Heero and Wufei and confusion on the part of Trowa; Sally Po and Lucrezia Noin did the same. Sally could see that Noin was not the confident representative of the Cinq Kingdom she had once been. Her eyes were red-rimmed and shadowed with heartbreak.

><br> "Let's leave these kids alone for awhile," Sally said to Noin. "Why don't you show me around Peacemillion. I have a feeling we're going to be calling this place home for the duration."

><br> Noin nodded and stepped out of the shuttle hangar with the other woman. Her relief at seeing Sally was almost palpable. They had only met once but their feelings about the war, the Gundam pilots and almost everything had been in total, compatible, accord. Noin was also relieved that Sally was here because now it wouldn't be so hard to leave them all behind. They would be alright in Sally's more than capable command. She herself was falling deeper and deeper into despair until she felt she was becoming more of a burden on the crew of Peacemillion than the commander they so desperately needed.

><br> "Thank God you're here Sally," Noin said, voicing her feelings. "I'm not sure how long I'll be able to be a part of this. Half of me is pulling for these kids and the other half . . ."

><br> Her voice trailed away and she hugged her arms around herself, she looked longingly out the portal in the direction of the Battleship Libra.

><br> "Listen to me," Sally said sharply, thinking that there was no way they needed an emotional breakdown from Noin at this point. The woman was a born leader and a damned good mobile suit pilot, one of the best she'd ever seen. In her skilled hands the Taurus suit they had on board was a necessary backup to the Gundams and those kids were going to need all the help they could get. "You have got to snap out of whatever funk you're in and come to your senses. We've got to help these boys. They are the only ones here in outer space that can end this senseless war. Dammit Noin we need you."

><br> "I can't fight against him, it's just not in me to do that Sally. You don't understand. I don't know why he's doing this and I hate what he's doing. But I can't hate him, I never could and I can't go up against him either. I tried, I did try, but I froze, I just froze," Noin tried to explain, her voice just above a whisper.

><br> Sally looked at her in shock. "Him? Milliardo Peacecraft? Dear God Noin, what do you mean? Are you in love with him?"

><br> Noin nodded silently. "The first time I saw Zechs I was only 12 years old and in the seven years since then I can tell you exactly

how many times he's touched my hand. I can tell you the length of time we've been apart from each other over the years since we graduated from Lake Victoria. Something's wrong, something must have happened to make him like this, but I can't abandon my feelings for him. I can't."

><br> Sally admitted to herself that she did not understand. She had dedicated her life to fighting wrongs and the closest thing to the kind of passion that Noin felt for Zechs was her deep admiration and belief in those five young men in there. They were what it was all about, and they would find a way to win. She had the utmost confidence in them. It was the highlight of her life to be working alongside them now.

><br> "Noin, please, how can you let these feelings cloud your judgement? I don't pretend to know how you feel, but pull yourself together. Try to look at this objectively," Sally pleaded. "We need you desperately."

><br> Noin shook her head. "I just wanted you to know. And I'm glad you'll be here for them if I can't be."

><br> She turned her back on Sally and walked away before she could see the tears sliding down her pale cheeks.

><br> It had been 14 hours and 45 minutes since she'd last seen Zechs.

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><br> Sally and Howard studied each other silently, sizing each other up as they awaited the return of the Gundam pilots and Noin from another skirmish with Milliardo Peacecraft. They'd saved the colony that OZ had taken hostage in order to subdue White Fang, but they'd been unable to stop the Libra from firing on the Earth.

><br> Sally wondered how Noin must feel now. Would her stubborn attachment to the White Fang commander be able to withstand this latest blow? Perhaps it had shaken her resolve not to fight him because she was apparently returning with the three Gundams who had gone out to protect the colony.

><br> In a corner of the bridge Wufei silently meditated on the course that should be taken. The one sure enemy was the Libra. It must be destroyed before they could even think of doing battle with Zechs Merquise . . . or Treize. His eyes narrowed as he remembered his last battle with the OZ commander, now Sovereign of the World Nation. He relived the humiliation of being the weaker combatant, of having to acknowledge that Khushrenada was an honorable foe. The next time he met him he would have Nataku, they would fight on his ground and . . . but he was digressing, letting himself be distracted from the initial goal. The Libra.

><br> "What exactly do we know about the Libra," he asked suddenly opening his eyes and startling the others on the bridge with the sudden announcement. He had been so quiet they had hardly remembered he had been there.

><br> "That's a good question," Howard said, considering the remark. "Not enough. Not enough at all. Now if I could get my hands on their data then we'd really know where we stand. We could plan. If I had the schematics we'd know where they're vulnerable. We've got limited fire power and we have to use it wisely. What I wouldn't give to have that information. But we don't and we just have to live with that. It decreases our odds but it's no use thinking about something we don't have."

><br> "Hmmmmm," Wufei muttered, closing his eyes and becoming silent again.

><br> Hilde paused in the doorway listening. She had come to make sure that Duo was okay and after hearing that he was she had lingered to find out what exactly they were planning on doing next.

><br> "If only we had that data," she thought to herself, folding her arms over her chest and slowly walking down the hallway. "There must be some way."

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> <br> Quatre knew very well that the angle of the Earth from the sector in space that Libra was situated on meant that the beam cannon's blast had decimated a lightly populated area somewhere south of the Equator in the western hemisphere. Still, it had sent such a jolt through him. If something happened to her he knew he'd crack, just like when Father and Iria had died . . . he looked at Sandrock, swarming with Peacemillion technicians. They looked like ants crawling over the damaged, massive hulk of the Gundam. He felt a little sorry for them, every time they took the suits out meant hours of intense repair work for the technicians. How she would have loved it. What he wouldn't give to look up and see her there . . . Linnea . . .

><br> "Quatre? Are you alright," a voice beside him questioned.

><br> "Sorry Trowa, I was just thinking. Wondering what we're going to do next," Quatre answered, regretfully pushing away his memories and trying to focus on the situation at hand.

><br> "I'm just hoping they can repair HeavyArms in time for the next encounter," Trowa said, looking at his mobile suit with what could almost be described as a fond look. "Now that I remember things I don't want to fight again without it."

><br> "Now that you remember I'm wondering if you'll ever be able to forgive me for what happened to you," Quatre said, letting his gaze shift from Sandrock to the Wing Zero.

><br> "Forgive what," Trowa asked simply. "There's nothing for me to forgive you for Quatre. I've seen the Zero System now, lived it. Seen what it can show a pilot . . ."

><br> His voice trailed off a little as he saw himself destroying the colony he had gone to save, destroying Cathrine, instead of protecting her. Only an illusion, he repeated to himself, unclenching his fists, an illusion.

><br> "Thanks for talking me through it," he said, glancing up at the other pilot.

><br> "I'm just happy you didn't make the same mistakes I did," Quatre answered.

><br> Trowa picked up a wrench and tossed it up a few feet in the air, catching it easily as it descended again. "Still, I wish Howard would at least let me help repair my Gundam. I have the feeling it won't be long until we're out there again."

><br> "They mean well," Quatre said, naturally understanding the motives of the others. "We should rest up for tomorrow I suppose."

><br> "There's still something bothering you, isn't there? Something besides the repairs and my forgiving you," Trowa said.

><br> Quatre sighed. "I'm just worried about someone-- the people on Earth. Do you really think he'd destroy it. Can he be serious?"

><br> Trowa shrugged, "anything is possible. We just have to try to keep that from happening, the destruction of Earth isn't the way to true peace. He's wrong about that."

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><br> "Have you seen Duo Maxwell," Hilde asked, tugging on the sleeve of a gray-haired technician.

><br> Desperation had led her to seek him out in the hangar. She still felt like a stranger amongst this group of technicians and the other Gundam pilots. She felt like she was in the way and not being

much help.

><br> "Hello young lady and who are you," the strangely-dressed technician said. "I'm Howard and Duo's up there in the cockpit. He sure does wreak havoc with those systems, I'm making him recalibrate the controls and he's none too happy about it."

><br> "I'm Hilde Schbeiker," she said, smiling a bit shyly at Howard. "I'm a friend of Duo's and that description fits him exactly. He sure hates being bored."

><br> "That's for sure," Howard commiserated. "It wasn't easy getting him up there to work on it. I don't know how Linnea managed to get him to do it every time."

><br> Hilde was on the verge of asking this Howard to give her all the details about Duo and Linnea. She must have been someone who worked on DeathScythe at one point or another. But Duo's voice rang out in the hangar, interrupting her chain of thought.

><br> "Howard!! I've had it, I'm coming down," he shouted. She watched him descend from the cockpit.

><br> "Then I guess it'll have to do," Howard said, shaking his head. "There are still a few more systems to test but . . ."

><br> "Can it Howard. DeathScythe is just fine. When did you get so uptight about all those recalibrations and stuff? It's not like you man," Duo said, slapping the older man on the shoulder.

><br> "Hi Duo," Hilde said, waving her hand in his face. "Do you have some time? We really need to talk."

><br> Before he could answer a boy about their age appeared beside them, suddenly and silently almost making Hilde jump with his abrupt arrival. He merely glanced at her, flicking his bottomless blue eyes over her unemotionally, almost as if he were deciding whether she was a threat or not. Then without a word he turned his attention to Duo.

><br> "We're going to go over some strategy on the bridge. Are you coming," Heero announced.

><br> "Strategy? I think the only choice we've got is to destroy them before they destroy us," Duo said.

><br> "Suit yourself," Heero said flatly, turning to leave.

><br> Duo rolled his eyes in annoyance but he turned to Hilde and said, "I've gotta talk to those guys I guess. I'll catch you later, okay?"

><br> All she could do was nod as he took off after the other pilot.

><br> Howard looked after them as they left the hangar. "I hate to say it but Duo's right. Without any information on the Libra strategy planning does seem kinda pointless."

><br> Hilde walked slowly out of the hangar. Her mind was humming with so many things. But what Howard had said was foremost. How could they plan without any knowledge of the Libra. There must be some way. She paused in the doorway and looked at the Peacemillion's fleet. There were the Gundams, Noin's Taurus and Sally's carrier shuttle. And there was a Taurus mobile-suit type shuttle. She knew how to pilot those, she'd been one of the few in her unit given the additional training.

><br> What would she be willing to do for peace, to help out Duo and his friends she wondered. She remembered telling her parents she was going to become a soldier. They had come near to forbidding it.

><br> "Why risk your life for something that can never come to be," her father had said. "Let the fools that are already involved take care of what they've started. We've stayed out of it and that's the safest way to be."

><br> She loved her parents but their apathy almost made her ill. And

if she didn't do anything now she'd be as bad as they were. She wasn't like that. One person could make a difference. She could make a difference.

><br> Hilde turned on her heel and went over to examine the Taurus shuttle.

><br>TO BE CONTINUED . . . Stuff will actually happen!! . . . I promise!! . . . As this story plods along to its inevitable conclusion!!! . . . Just one more chapter and an epilogue left!!

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## 7. Love is a Battlefield, Chapter 7A

Author's Note: Yes, believe it or not, I've written Chapter 7 of this fic. I knew I shouldn't have started Alone/Together until I finished this!! Bad, stupid me . . . As for that fic, look for more possibly this weekend . . . As for this fic, I split this chapter into two sections because it's a VERY long chapter and this part is done and I know people are waiting, the rest should be complete very shortly. It won't be another month, I promise!

><br>LOVE IS A BATTLEFIELD

>Chapter 7A<br>

>By Midii Une<br>

> As fast as the shuttle carrying them deeper into space the final battle approached. She could see the faces of all the combatants clearly even though her eyes looked at stars and colonies and hordes of mobile suits and mobile dolls sprinkled across the vastness of space.<br>

> "Miss Linnea," an officer said. "We're approaching the resource satellite MO-II, please buckle up."<br>

> She turned from the window and sat down without a word, lost in her thoughts. What horrors and loss would the next hours bring? She pushed the concept to the back of her mind, her heart torn between two of the three factions that were ready to face off. It was going to happen now for better or worse, a battle to the end, a battle for peace, a battle for outer space, a battle for the Earth . . . And when it was over? Then what?<br>

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> Hilde ignored the stunning vista of outer space that surrounded her Taurus shuttle. She forced herself to concentrate on her self-imposed mission. Tried to play out everything she would do in her mind. She was small and she was quick. Hilde thought her chances of obtaining the data on Libra and escaping from the battleship undetected were better than average. She wasn't a Gundam pilot, no one knew her face or affiliation, she was the one with the best chance of success.<br>

> Duo couldn't be angry with her if she didn't fail, she reasoned. He might make a show of yelling at her, but inside he'd be proud of her she knew. A grim look of determination settled itself on her deceptively adorable face. A look nearly worthy of Shinigami himself. Hilde was going to make a difference.<br>

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> Relena Peacecraft didn't see the the awe-inspiring view of outer space that lay beyond the observation portal of her room on the Libra. Her room. Her cell. Dorothy had had the nerve to lock her in after she refused to assassinate her own brother. It was starting to occur to her that war had driven Dorothy Catalonia insane. She didn't

see the view because her eyes were closed and she was far away. Her heart was searching for Heero Yuy. He was in space and so was she and perhaps they would find each other again.<br>

> There was still a chance she could get through to Milliardo. She clung to that hope, if only she could speak to him again she was sure she could make him see that his plans made a mockery of the Peacecraft philosophy of absolute pacifism. Relena had a sickening feeling that if she didn't convince her brother of this that there would be a battle between him and the Gundam pilot she loved. A terrifying clash of state-of-the-art war weapons between Milliardo Peacecraft and Heero Yuy. How ironic that the names of the combatants should be Peacecraft and Yuy. The names symbolized the struggle for peace on Earth and in Space. But Relena did not appreciate the irony, she saw only that by the end of all this chaos one of them would be dead.<br>

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><br> Relena.

><br> He knew that she was thinking about him. It bothered him.

><br> He was nothing but a soldier, a disposable commodity. His mission was to fight against those who continued these meaningless battles.

><br> Her mission was to bring the healing balm of peace to the world when the fighting was over. In his mind it was much more difficult to represent peace. To maintain an attitude of absolute pacifism in the face of absolute madness. Only she was strong enough.

><br> Relena.

><br> She shouldn't be thinking about him. He shouldn't be envisioning her eyes, as sparkling and blue as the water surrounding the Cinq Kingdom. Confident eyes that had never done wrong. Never killed. Never failed in their mission.

><br> To the outside observer the turmoil inside the 01 pilot was invisible as always.

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> <br> His words repeated themselves in her brain. She felt as if she was swimming toward the surface that was her consciousness. The water she swam through was holding her back, as if it was full of seaweed tugging her back down. But she fought against it. She felt as if she could see a light far away. Like the sun sparkling through a league of azure water.

><br> If she could reach the light she could reach out to His Excellency. He had lost sight of the true beauty of battle.

><br> To the outside observer the medical status of Lady Une remained unchanged.

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> <br> "Sorry we were cut off. I did a bit more thinking about your problem. Hope this helps. By the way, don't forget that after each battle you must recalibrate the cockpit devices in DeathScythe. Your pilot gets a bit too enthusiastic and the systems go all out of wack. Don't forget, you'll need optimum performance with what you'll be up against. LL."

><br> Duo stared at the words and the two letters that had once meant so much to him. LL. She still remembered and she obviously still gave a damn. It had been easier to believe that she didn't.

><br> He should have known she wouldn't stop caring and the words were there in black and white, right there on a paper on the table Howard liked to call his command center.

><br> A flood of memories washed up to the surface like the water slapping violently against the freighters out on the Pacific. It was like she was right there in the hangar, the irritated tone of her

voice coming through in the words. How easily she got upset when he pulled a throttle too hard or pushed a button too aggressively.

><br> But she never complained when he took her in his arms.

><br> Duo looked up at DeathScythe and spoke to the mecha with his mind.

><br> "She still cares buddy," he thought. "I bet you already knew that though, huh."

><br> Sometimes he wondered if the other pilots ever talked to their Gundams like he did. He suspected that they must. Hell, he'd even caught technical, no-nonsense Linnea chatting away with DeathScythe one day at Quatre's base while she sat in the cockpit working on something or another.

><br> He sighed. Every battle might be the final one. As he strapped in and the cockpit flooded with neon green light he closed his eyes and thought of her as he'd always used to do. Before . . .

><br> "Wish me luck baby," he said.

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><br> Hilde looked at the disc in her hand. It was definitely worth the risk. The Libra was huge and there would be no way to make any sort of attack on it without knowing where all the strategic points were located. And then there was her other discovery -- the two Gundanium mobile dolls. The Mercurius and the Vayeate. There was something chilling about them and something chilling about the girl with the long pale hair. She had looked at those suits as if they were something alive, as though the sight of them gave her an amoral sort of pleasure.

><br> Hilde shuddered and took a last glance back at the Libra. She had never been so happy in her life to see the last of something, but despite the speed her mobile suit was starting to attain the huge battleship seemed to be reluctant to let her out of its shadow.

><br> Relena Peacecraft, the girl she had met, the one she'd heard so much about on the television news, really was brave to stay on the Libra, Hilde thought. She herself had felt sick and suffocated while on board, even though it was more than twice as large as Peacemillion.

><br> She looked back again, her blue eyes peering through the darkness. She sighed in relief, the Libra was out of sight. But before she could turn her attention back to her course for Peacemillion two sparkling and ominous glints appeared in the distance.

><br> And any mobile suit pilot knew what that meant.

><br> Hilde looked at the disc in her hand and wished there was a way to send it hurtling through space to the Peacemillion ahead of her. Because right now she wasn't sure that she herself was ever going to make it there.

><br> "Come on, damn you," she urged the Taurus suit as she tried to increase speed. But the indicator in the cockpit clearly showed that whatever was following her was going to catch her well before she reached her destination. She had no choice but to send out an SOS.

><br> "Peacemillion . . ."

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><br> Wufei was disgusted. Battling mobile dolls was even more unsatisfactory than battling a weak opponent. Nataku moved almost of its own volition to decimate the powerful weapons of war that seemed to almost reproducing before their eyes. "Send as many as you want," Wufei thought. "It's still a meaningless battle being fought against a horde of soulless machines."

><br> The whole situation revolted him. White Fang and its leader Milliardo Peacecraft had turned outer space into a battlefield and Treize was increasing the hostilities, massing his mobile suit army, the largest ever assembled, out there at MO-II.

><br> Treize Khushrenada. Frustration, humiliation and shame. His shame. All tied up in that one name. And yet he couldn't wait to meet him again. It would happen, if destiny had any sense of justice, it would happen.

><br> Altron's two powerful dragon fangs shot out with deadly force, anchoring themselves in the midsections of two nearby mobile dolls, time paused for the minute fraction of a second and the dolls, the empty warriors, exploded in a blast of blinding light and deafening sound. But the awesome display of power and the lack of an opponent worthy of such a show only intensified Wufei's sense of futility. He wouldn't feel any satisfaction in battle till he met him again. Treize Khushrenada.

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><br> Duo wouldn't have minded facing a few dozen mobile dolls right about then, better than the foe he was actually facing.

><br> Trowa.

><br> Heero.

><br> But yet they were not. An eerie sensation filled him, he was almost unable to convince his mind that the two other Gundam pilots weren't inside those suits. His eyes and mind were both telling him that the pilots were Trowa and Heero. The style, the ability, everything intact, perfectly recreated in the mobile dolls.

><br> But they were just dolls after all. And the trademark Maxwell self-confidence kicked itself in. What a chance. To take on Heero and Trowa at the same time.

><br> And he was Shinigami. A grin without humor, a grin worthy of the devil himself appeared on his face. He forgot everything. Linnea and Hilde. Libra and Peacemillion. All that mattered was the battle and that he would win.

><br> He was Shinigami.

><br> That's what it was to be a Gundam pilot.

><br> When the Mercurius and Vayeate were nothing but smoldering space junk Duo's eyes sparkled victoriously. Had there ever really been any doubt who the best was?

><br> The sparkle faded as suddenly as it had appeared.

><br> "Hilde," he said softly closing his eyes and concentrating on her. Thinking that if he shouted her name as his mind was screaming at him to do and she didn't answer that would be it. If he whispered then he could try louder and louder until she responded. He was superstitious about such things and he wanted to give her all the chances he could. Screaming was definitely not cool.

><br> He only had to raise his voice a little more to get her to respond and he picked her up on the communications screen.

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><br> She paused in her final systems check on the Tallgeese to listen to the status report an officer was presenting to Gen. Treize.

><br> "The enemy has lost more than half of it's mobile doll force and it's being reported that two Gundanium mobile dolls patterned on the Mercurius and Vayeate were destroyed by Gundam 02. The enemy arsenal is significantly undermined," the officer said.

><br> Linnea continued the systems check, her hands moving with confidence over the controls, as usual everything was as it should be, in perfect working order. Of course His Excellency would never think of forcing a throttle or jamming his finger on a firing button

with extra emphasis. Not like Duo . . .

><br> "Destroyed by Gundam O2." The words repeated in her head and the corners of her lips turned up in a pleased little smile of satisfaction. Her Gundam, her pilot. In a hidden corner, buried deep in her heart, she still saw them that way. She'd known he was the best from the moment he walked into that hangar so many months ago.

><br> She ran a hand almost tenderly over the control panel. The Tallgeese II, a beautiful combination of elegance and artistry, design and power that had never been achieved in a mobile suit before. It WAS Treize. Between them they had recreated his commanding presence in the form of a mobile suit. It was an achievement in engineering that would probably never occur again. Linnea tried not to but she couldn't help but think that this one good thing from her relationship with Treize could not hope to match the bad. Because although Duo had destroyed Mercurius and Vayeate the Epyon was still out there.

><br> His blue eyes bored into her violet ones. The scenario of the soldier leaving his beloved was an integral part of the beauty and romance of battle, Treize had always thought so. How hard he had tried to instill the chivalric ideals into his soldiers. He had already said farewell to Lady Une and now he raised Linnea's hand to his lips, they lingered there on the back of her hand, his gloved fingers feeling the quickening pulse beat in the wrist he held, remembering for an instant those eyes of hers liquid with passion as she lay beneath him.

><br> Treize glanced at the mobile suit and knew he would not come back to either of the women he'd said farewell to. But he'd leave the business of peace in their gentler hands, theirs and Relena Peacecraft's.

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><br> Duo winced as he looked at Hilde's mobile suit, it wasn't often you saw a suit sustain that kind of damage. Usually if things got that bad the suit and the pilot ended up destroyed.

><br> Especially suits that met up with Heero and Trowa. Or himself for that matter.

><br> Hilde was nearly as banged up as the suit itself, she'd lost consciousness before they could get back to Peacemillion. It was hard to watch as they pried her out of the damaged suit. He'd never seen anyone hurt so badly.

><br> The enemies who'd met with Shinigami didn't end up hurt. They ended up meeting their maker.

><br> Thanks pal, he said, looking up at his Gundam. Thanks for helping me save Hilde.

><br> He jumped over the catwalk railing into the diminished gravity and landed next to the stretcher. They'd already hooked up an IV and started a blood transfusion. He wasn't a doctor but he'd felt the agonizing pain of taking hits in his suit. She had to be suffering from internal bleeding.

><br> "Can I have a minute," he asked and the med techs left them alone. As badly as she was hurt only luck or determination could keep her alive, but they would do the best they could.

><br> Her eyes flickered open as she felt the touch of his hand pushing back her hair. His touch was so oddly gentle, it didn't seem like it was Duo touching her. He touched her like he was afraid of breaking her. She wondered if she was going to die.

><br> "Duo," she breathed, the volume of her voice not even that of a whisper. "Get the disk, please . . .

><br> "Screw the fucking disc Hilde," Duo muttered hoarsely, immediately ashamed at his language when she was laying there like

that.

><br> An almost-smile appeared on her face. "How would you feel if those were the last words I ever heard," she managed to tease him, before the smile turned into a grimace of pain.

><br> "Don't joke about that," Duo said. "I'm the one that tells the death jokes around here, I'll sue you for copyright."

><br> She was silent so long he thought she might have lost consciousness again.

><br> "Duo. You can't sue me. You already own everything I have, including my heart. Please listen . . . I love you. I'm sorry about getting caught, I should have been more careful," she said.

><br> "Hilde," Duo said, furiously blinking back tears that welled and burned in his eyes. Her blue eyes held a strange look, peaceful and happy, despite the obvious pain she was in. He bent to kiss her cheek "I love you too," he whispered against her neck.

><br> When he looked up her eyes were closed again. He didn't know if she'd heard him or not.

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Dorothy swallowed her fury, giving vent to her anger only in the little barbs she could inflict on the annoying Quinze.

><br> It hadn't been as easy as it looked.

><br> Her spectacular army of mobile dolls destroyed by the Gundams. Their force was depleted. And she'd lost the Vayeate and Mercurius as well. She admired Mr. Milliardo's cool acceptance of her defeat, of the blows dealt to their cause.

><br> And now Mr. Treize was approaching.

><br> The silent fury was punctured by a tiny sensation of fear. Her father. Her grandfather. She had almost cracked then, almost forgotten when Grandfather died that war was beautiful. Glorious, she repeated to herself. Duke Dermail's death had been glorious . . . but Mr. Treize couldn't die. No, not even when faced with the Libra's beam cannon.

><br> Her eyes sparkled dangerously. War that had taken everything away from her and given nothing in return was about to pay her back. She would be a witness to the most awe-inspiring battle in all of history. The expansive view of space opened up before her from her place on the bridge of the Libra. Almost as if she were sitting in a velvet-covered chair in a box seat at the opera. But would this end in tragedy or triumph? A battle of two childhood friends, both highly-skilled and well-versed in the code of honor. She clasped her hands tightly over her chest and felt the excited quickening of her heartbeat.

><br> It was as if she expected a visit from a lover, not the battle to come.

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He despised himself and his weakness and as Treize approached him finally he vowed to himself that he would squelch any lingering feelings of friendship and loyalty to the man who represented Earth.<br>

> His eyes, the cold color of the sky on a sunny winter morning, stared out at the Earth. Total peace was worth anything. The end of the Earth, the end of Treize, the end of even himself. Milliardo Peacecraft. Yes, Peacecraft at last. Because he was doing this for the sake of peace. He would punish Earth with destruction and punish outer space with a view of that destruction so that in the future the possibility of war would be too terrible to be broached again.<br>

> He could resist Treize, he did not doubt it. Treize would even push

him into it, if he knew him, and he did. His victory would be assured now if he'd only used Epyon to destroy Peacemillion. But in order to do that he would have had to fight Noin. Kill Noin.<br>

> And although he knew that that was what it was going to come to with Treize he still was too weak to fight her, her and her damned loving and accepting nature that could see no wrong in him no matter what he might do.<br>

> Despite himself Noin's love wrapped itself around his heart like a soothing balm to his tortured soul. If nothing else in this life had been good to him, he had at least earned the love of a strong and beautiful woman and a skilled and loyal soldier.<br>

> <br>TO BE CONTINUED . . . Next time (Soon, this week I hope, nearly finished) on Love is a Battlefield 7B ^~. . . an unlikely friendship springs up following a tragic sacrifice . . . Duo's feelings for Linnea affect his judgment . . . Quatre wishes for a happy ending . . . Certain people are already unsatisfied with the hard-won peace.

> <br>

## 8. Love is a Battlefield, Chapter 7B

Author's Note: It didn't take much for me to realize that in the beginning of this chapter I sounded an awful lot like Dorothy Catalonia!! \*rushes to mirror to check eyebrows\* Anyway, it's still not over, this chapter is evolving into more than I had originally planned so I've had to split this sucker into 3 parts. Make sure you've read 7A and find Chapter 8 posted right after this.

><br>

>Love is a Battlefield<br>by Midii Une

><br>Chapter 7B

><br> There was complete silence and an extended dramatic pause as the military forces of the World Nation hung in space like so many sparkling ornaments shining in the cold starlight.

><br> The pause was orchestrated by His Excellency himself, he wanted to impress this moment on his troops. This supreme moment when everlasting peace for the Earth they loved hung in the balance. It was a moment to be savored, a moment not to be rushed.

><br> Then the magnificent hand of the Tallgees II unfurled itself elegantly and the mobile suit piloted by Treize Khushrenada shot unhesitatingly toward the enemy--Zechs Merquise.

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><br> Her very soul felt like it was afire, like it was trying to remain in her body while something was trying to extricate it from her by force. The slow, measured thud of her heartbeat became a quick, staccato rhythm and her lids flew open to reveal the startled eyes of velvety brown that they had hidden for so long. Eyes that hadn't opened in several months.

><br> Instantly the medical staff was galvanized by the familiar commanding voice, even as their brains struggled with the concept that she was conscious and standing before them. She seemed almost magically to suffer no after effects from her long struggle to live. A few of the younger medics even stared as if they were seeing a ghost.

><br> In the hangar the technicians were just putting their tools away. The less experienced members of the team were still wondering why they had even bothered to install the space travel boosters on the Gundam that had been left behind. Practically every other weapon on Earth was now in space. The Wing stood alone, gleaming softly under the fluorescent lights, the sole representative of military

power on the depleted planet. Every weapon gone, every pilot with them. The technicians grumbled but they knew that if Miss Linnea returned and found the suit incomplete they wouldn't want to face the unforgiving flash of her deep purple eyes. Her eyes could harden till they resembled amethysts.

><br> A hush fell over the vast, cavernous area and not even a mutter could be heard. Lady Une, helmet under her arm, spoke to no one. Her eyes scanned the men and the hangar and finally rested on the Wing.

><br> If only Mr. Treize were here to appreciate the beautiful irony. She would come to him in outer space. She would be arriving in a Gundam.

><br>

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> On MO-II they were preparing for the worst. Linnea's fingers itched, she knew that in a very short time the hangars would be filled with damaged mobile suits, if only there was some way to get a jump on all the work that was ahead. Almost on auto pilot herself, she directed the technicians to set up work stations and be ready for incoming damaged suits. <br>

> It was so quiet now, as if the very air itself was waiting, waiting for something to happen.<br>

> The gut-wrenching calm before the storm, the very stillness made her want to scream or destroy something, anything to break the awful silence.<br>

> And then a soft buzzing swept through the hangar. The storm approached and then broke over her. The Libra. The Libra was going to fire its main cannon at Gen. Treize. At the World Nation's Forces. At the MO-II. The whispers of the men echoed softly through the hangar as Linnea turned on her heel and headed for the bridge, the low-level gravity of the resource satellite seeming to impede her progress like the sensation in a nightmare.<br>

> As she stepped through the doorway she could see the image on the observation screen.<br>

> "Treize," she thought. "Why aren't you moving? Move dammit . . ."<br>

> The Libra cannon began to glow eerily, the light becoming brighter and brighter till it was almost unbearable to look at. And still he didn't move, facing down Zechs Merquise, refusing to be budged from his spot.<br>

> Everyone in the control room on MO-II shielded their eyes and braced themselves for the hit as a stream of pure energy emitted from the massive Libra beam cannon.<br>

>\*\*\*\*\*<br>

> Only a slight tightening of his grip on the throttle indicated Treize's feelings as he waited for the future he had been shown by Epyon.<br>

> He didn't know that someone whose feelings for him were stronger than the effects of the Zero System had the power to change that future.<br>

> The light seared his eyes, forcing him to close his lids before the impact in a damnable act of cowardice. He had wanted to go out with his eyes open, unflinchingly standing his ground as a true soldier should. The impact that came was amazingly mild but he felt intense heat as the blast came close to him and then brushed past, moving onward to decimate a few corps of mobile suits and a portion of MO-II before dissipating harmlessly into space.<br>

> Treize opened his eyes and saw the smoldering husk of the Gundam Wing beside him. The hatch opened and the pilot emerged miraculously unharmed and floated delicately and gracefully as an angel toward the

untouched Tallgees II. Perhaps this was death after all, he thought. Was the end only a strange and warped continuation of the lives people had lived in the Earthly sphere? Then the helmeted head of the lovely figure turned and the mask grew translucent so he could see the face beneath.<br>

> "Lady," he breathed.<br>

> His attitude changed, the feelings he had had since piloting Epyon disappeared. With her by his side again perhaps the visions of Epyon could be altered. They already had been. If only she could have seen the tenderness and love in his eyes as he watched her head for MO-II. He had to believe she could feel it, now they were one person, one mind. Again.<br>

> "All troops," he announced, his voice confident and purposeful. He knew now he would be victorious, the supreme confidence he had always had in himself restored by Lady Une.<br>

> "Destroy Libra now."<br>

>\*\*\*\*\*<br>

> "Whoa," Duo exclaimed. "That was a close one."<br>

> The Peacemillion crew was observing the clash between the World Nation and the Libra on the screen.<br>

> "Now we have to make a choice," Sally said. "Do we keep fighting on our own or do we join the World Nation and help destroy Libra?"<br>

> There really was no choice. The World Nation was the lesser of two evils, for now they would have to fight with Treize Khushrenada to end the threat posed by the White Fang commander Zechs Merquise and the hordes of mobile dolls he commanded.<br>

> Noin ignored the conversation as the pilots dissected their options. She was starting to understand what Zechs was planning to do. Starting to understand why he was doing this. Her heart swelled with pain, she hadn't thought it could get any worse. Noin's eyes were dry but they burned. For awhile she had doubted his actions, his purpose. But now she could believe again.<br>

> There could be only one reason for Zechs to act the way he was, one reason Zechs would fire on Treize. He was trying to bring about peace in the only way he knew how. Through battle. All the lingering questions in her mind were answered and a strange tranquility flowed through her, she didn't have to fight him any more. He was doing what was right. He was still the perfect knight she had fallen in love with as an idealistic young girl.<br>

> She closed her eyes and saw that boy, the boy that would become Zechs Merquise, hiding himself in shame behind dark glasses or a mask because of what he had become. A Peacecraft who excelled in the art of war. A Peacecraft whose heart cried out for revenge. She remembered sneaking adoring looks at him across a table in the library at Lake Victoria as they studied. She had admired everything about him, his noble, royal beauty and his excellence as a student, as a mobile suit pilot and as a soldier. Indeed it had all come so easily to them both. And yet all that either of them really wanted was peace for the Earth and for outer space.<br>

> And when the others pledged to destroy Libra she closed her heart against them and made no such vow herself.<br>

> "Forgive me Zechs," she thought. "Forgive me for not understanding you."<br>

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> The officers and staff on the MO-II bridge heaved a collective sigh of relief as the smoke and light cleared and the Tallgees appeared undamaged on the screen.

><br> "How," Officer Vier muttered, voicing the thoughts of all of them. It had appeared that Gen. Treize had intended to stand his

ground.

><br> "The Wing," Linnea answered, making out the remains of the mobile suit as the sky cleared. "But who could have piloted it?"

><br> She shook her head and clenched her fists. She had to do something, something productive. In her mind, with her eyes shielded against the blast, she had seen the mobile suit disintegrate until nothing was left. Nothing at all. Saw his blue eyes fade into blackness.

><br> "Right," she said. "What's the damage report? Bring it up now!"

><br> She looked at the findings. The damage to MO-II was negligible and required no attention, only an abandoned section of the satellite had been blasted, the structure had withstood the blast fairly well. The angle of the hit had resulted in the best case scenario for them. However, and she frowned, there were more than two dozen mobile suits out there that had sustained crippling damage from the heat of the blast, not to mention the 10 or so that had disintegrated in the path of the beam cannon. She blinked furiously trying to erase the vision she'd had of the Tallgees.

><br> She had to do something or go out of her mind.

><br> "I'll need a transport shuttle and a crew, we'll do onsite repairs and get some of those suits operational again. We can also bring in the survivors who can't pilot anymore and bring in the suits that sustained too much damage to be repaired to use for parts. It looks like there's a possibility of a drawn-out battle," Linnea said. "We can't waste anything at this point. There is no backup, everything we have is out there. We've lost too much as it is."

><br> She looked around the room.

><br> "Volunteers only. We're going out into the heart of the battlefield," she added.

> <br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> Was it possible that peace was unattainable?

><br> Zechs was starting to wonder. He controlled his anger and frustration but he couldn't believe that Treize had survived that blast, he had been planted right in its path. How could Gundam Wing appear in space like that to push him out of the way? Despite himself his clenched fist pounded on the bridge console and he gritted his teeth as his ice-blue eyes sparked dangerously.

><br> "Can I accomplish nothing in this quest for peace," he thought hopelessly. He hadn't been able to destroy Peacemillion and now Treize escaped through some miraculous intervention. And now the World Nation had the upper hand and Treize would take full advantage.

><br> "Fire the cannon again," he ordered.

><br> Only to be informed that it had broken down yet again. He clenched both fists so tightly that blood seeped from his palms where the nails dug through his gloves into the tender skin. Thwarted, thwarted at every turn and if Treize was victorious now it would all be for nothing.

><br> He had to get out of there, away from the eyes of Dorothy and Quinze. He had to do what he was best at. In Epyon he could destroy them all, Treize and his army, the Gundams and the Peacemillion. The mobile dolls could hold off Treize's deployments for awhile, he'd take care of the Gundams himself.

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><br> Linnea concentrated on the repairs, perhaps it was foolish to be out here but at least it was quiet and she didn't have to think about what was happening around her. Flashes of light barely made it

into her line of vision as the glare of battle did little to cut through the darkness of space.

><br> She really didn't want to know, she thought, at least not till it was all over. As long as she was working on a mobile suit she could keep her mind from straying, from seeing the ones she cared about being decimated by beams of killing light.

><br> Linnea turned in annoyance as one of the technicians grabbed her arm and shook her to get her attention. She shook her head at him then gave up and turned her sound system back on.

><br> "Mobile dolls," he said. "Headed straight for us."

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> "It's moving," Sally said. "The Libra is leaving the battlefield and heading toward Earth."

><br> Her young, resiliant eyes met Howard's eyes, eyes that were still young in a face that had seen so much over the years.

><br> The Peacemillion was his pride and joy. But everyone had to make their sacrifice to make peace possible.

><br> "Alright," he said. "We'll ram the Libra."

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> All the players watched as slowly and inexorably the Peacemillion maintained its course toward Libra's main cannon. The information Hilde had risked her life for showing them that they were definitely on the right course, at this trajectory the weapon that made the battleship so fearsome would be taken completely out of the picture.

><br> It seemed so strange to those watching out in space, all battles seemed to suspend themselves as the main drama focussed on the two ships. The collision was soundless as watching a silent film, it seemed so unreal as the smaller ship gracefully forced itself into the heart of the larger battleship like a dagger wielded by a vengeful god.

><br> On Libra Heero lay on top of Relena in the darkness, the weight on top of him symbolic of his life as a soldier, the weight of the universe, the weight of all mankind around his neck. It was his mission. The chunk of wall that threatened to crush him was nothing compared to all that. Despite the feel of her, warm and soft and trusting beneath him, he could only think about Zechs. Now Zechs would be forced to make a move, now his plans had been turned back. Heero knew that the main weapon had been destroyed.

><br> He heard her voice soft and confident in his ear. She saw what she wanted to see. All he saw was that she was the hope for the future and that he and Zechs would have to fight one more battle to make that future a reality. And yet, from a place inside him that even he had forgotten existed, he bent his head and pressed his cheek against her neck, feeling the softness of her hair against his face like the brush of an angel's wing and the warmth of her breath against his ear, he smelled her fragrance, the innocent scent of lily of the valley invaded his senses.

><br> Then, almost angrily he braced his muscles and called on a reserve of almost superhuman strength and flipped the heavy piece of debris off them. He helped her up briskly and ignored her thanks for his protection. It was time for him to find Zero, time for him to get Relena out of here.

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> The mobile suits they had come to repair were still useless, unable to move for the most part. Even if they could move they couldn't outrun those mobile dolls, certainly the transport they'd arrived in couldn't either. Linnea bit her lip trying to think as the small group of White Fang's mobile dolls headed for them, picking up

the mobile suits they were programmed to destroy. They weren't alive, they wouldn't see they were just a group of unarmed technicians floating helplessly in space. Why did she always act without thinking? She didn't care much for herself but the others shouldn't have to pay for her mistakes.

><br> Not for the first time she wondered why she could be so smart about some things and yet continually made stupid mistakes like this. Too often she ignored common sense when she was frightened or hurting.

><br> She screamed as suddenly the dolls were upon them and a blast took out half of the damaged mobile suits and the technicians and pilots working on them. As a unit the dolls turned toward the rest of the group . . . but instantly a green glow lit the sky and the White Fang weapons evaporated, the blast shoving the technicians back with it's force. When the light faded Linnea could see it.

><br> DeathScythe.

><br> "What the hell are you people trying to do out here," a familiar voice sounded in her ears.

><br> She couldn't answer, someone shook her again, but she didn't respond, her eyes glued to the Gundam.

><br> "We're technicians from MO-II out here repairing these World Nation mobile suits, we had to reclaim these, we've lost too many," someone answered for her, for which she was eternally grateful.

><br> Linnea wished her eyes could see through the Gundanium. See Duo.

><br> "Damn," Duo said. "Who the hell thought up a crazy scheme like that? You better get your asses back to MO-II right now, screw the suits, the shit's about to hit the fan."

><br> He blasted off again leaving a trail of light behind from the space boosters Howard must have fitted the DeathScythe with.

><br> "Duo," she whispered.

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><br> Wufei had been waiting for this for a long time. He could see Treize, see his skill evident in every blow he struck against the mobile dolls. They weren't worthy opponents but they had ability, he had to admit that, they were difficult to destroy.

><br> At last they were going to meet on a battlefield, and now the weapons would not be swords. He could use Nataku with honor this time and with Nataku he could not lose. He relived their last duel, his weakness, his humiliation. His shame that the enemy had proven to be an honorable foe after all. It was so much easier to hate a dishonorable, weak enemy and he despised himself for the reluctant admiration he felt for Treize Khushrenada.

><br> He continued destroying the mobile dolls as Treize did the same. And when outer space was cleared of the soulless warriors they would purge themselves of the meaningless victory and take on each other.

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> She was shaking so badly someone had to help her off the transport shuttle, Linnea didn't think she'd be able to stand without a hand to hold her up. She was grateful now for the low gravity that had slowed her down earlier.

><br> She pulled off the helmet and leaned up against the wall, her head on her arm, seeing the suits and men disappearing in the light. And Duo, he had been there, he had saved her from that. And she hadn't deserved to be saved. She knew that she was trembling not only from the close call but from seeing him again, seeing DeathScythe appear in between her and death like some dark avenging angel.

><br> "Ma'am," a voice said softly. It was a young technician, just a beginner, he'd volunteered to go with her. They were probably actually about the same age, but she felt so much older. He was looking at her with concern and reached to touch her forehead with his gloved hand. "You're hurt, bleeding," he said, showing her the red on his fingertips, talking to her as if she were shell-shocked or hard of hearing.

><br> "I'm sorry," she choked. "It was all my fault, those men . . ."

><br> "We did the right thing, Miss Linnea. We needed those suits," the boy said. "It was really something, better than staying around here. Did you see that mobile suit that saved us? It was a Gundam. I've seen a Gundam!"

><br> She looked away. Like so many others he thought she was brave and smart, but she was nothing, nothing but a frightened, stupid little girl.

> <br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> "I oughta kill you guys," Duo said, cocking his gun and glaring at the huddled group of wizened scientists. The ones who had engineered this whole mess. The ones who had stuck their dirty little hands and/or metal claws in everybody else's lives. Did they actually think their little scheme of messing with the Libra's main cannon was enough to compensate for all they'd done?

><br> Professor G looked at him knowingly. Duo hated that piercing look. It was as if the old freak could see what was hidden far below the surface of his mind. Just like when he'd wanted to blow up DeathScythe before even going to Earth. The professor'd read his mind and talked him out of it, turned it all around so it seemed like his own idea to go to Earth and wreak the vengeance of Shinigami.

><br> "If you destroy us you won't be getting rid of the problem," Professor G said, seemingly nonchalantly. Dr. J looked at his comrade questioningly. He wondered what the hell he meant by that but decided to let him continue. "We're old and getting useless, our time is past. Killing us won't mean a thing unless you finish things up by destroying Lang's daughter."

><br> Duo's eyes widened. Linnea? What the hell did he mean by that?

><br> "That's right. Lang's daughter. Our legacy to this world, in case it should ever need the Gundams again. She will know what to do. Our priority in sending her to OZ was to keep her alive through this. She's the future, the safeguard of the peace to come," Professor G explained. "And what safer place to keep our trump card than right inside the enemy's camp?"

><br> "Now stop being foolish Duo and get us over to Peacemillion so we can save the Earth," Professor G said, hoping he hadn't gone too far with the words about Lang's daughter. The girl was as in the dark as anyone else but she had played her part to perfection, responding to their expert string-pulling like all the good little puppets had. Her Epyon was one of the necessary and integral pieces in the complicated puzzle that would result in peace.

><br> "Fine," Duo said shortly. "I'll take you."

><br> Professor G looked triumphantly at the others. When it came to his pilot he knew exactly which buttons to push.

><br> He never knew how much Duo wanted to kill him in that moment.

><br> As he dashed through space carrying his nasty little cargo of scientific blight that had probably done more than anything to bring about this war, his mind strayed back to her. He'd have to find Linnea after it was over. Find out what her intentions were. Her name and memories of her face still had power over him. He had to find out

what that meant for both of them.

><br> If it wasn't for her he would gladly have killed them. But he had a deeply-ingrained sense of justice, belied by his easy smiles and laughter. It was true that if he killed them it wouldn't matter, as long as Linnea lived. And his heart couldn't tolerate that thought of that, not at all. Professor G had known that and used it to save all their miserable lives.

><br> Duo prayed he hadn't let himself make a horrible mistake by giving in to sentiment for a girl he wasn't sure how he felt about.

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> The tall woman flicked her unreadable brown eyes over her appraisingly as if trying to find something in her that would give her the answer to something. Linnea stared back, this was Lady Une.

> <br> A mere child. A mere child with the mind of a genius and a pretty face, nothing more. And yet she had meant something to Treize, had been there for him when she could not be.

><br> Lady Une wondered vaguely what it might have been like to have lived as only a woman and not a soldier. She had let the soldier in her take over her life, her voice was the voice of command; her touch hard, not soft; she had locked the feelings of a woman deep inside. Sometimes his touch had nudged something deep in her, made the hidden woman move restlessly but she had always put her back to sleep again. There was no room for such things in the life of the soldier. She had forced herself to live an austere life and deny herself love and pleasure for his sake.

><br> The girl before her hadn't had such scruples and a sharp prick of jealousy touched her heart for only an instant. When he came back and the world was at peace it would be different. She would be different, her true self would emerge finally like an enchanting butterfly from its cocoon. Her eyes softened to a velvety texture and her face fell into gracious lines.

><br> "Miss Lang," she said kindly. "We're so glad you made it back unharmed."

><br> And she meant what she said.

><br> Linnea studied her as well. She'd heard rumors but there was nothing concrete. Treize's right hand, Lady Une had done anything, not even short of murder for him. But had there been anything between them? She didn't seem terrifying at all, as the tone of voice of gossips had indicated. She managed a faint, crooked smile back at the older woman.

><br> "Thank you," she said, puzzling over the differences in the severe soldier she'd met briefly when Trowa had brought her to OZ headquarters and the woman she saw now. Professional, yes, but dedicated and concerned and she seemed to have gathered an aura of gentleness around herself.

><br> His voice interrupted their thoughts.

><br> "Lady," he said. "How many have died today?"

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><br> Wufei faltered in his resolve. Could the aristocratic noble really understand the concept of what others sacrificed for him and the meaningless battles he had surrounded himself with? For the first time in his life, despite what had been shown to him by the Zero System, he was unsure what to do. Was killing Treize the solution? Would he feel victorious? Would his cause be vindicated? Would it be justice?

><br> Out of the corner of his eye something broke through his meditation in the pause of battle. The blue and white mobile suit was blasting toward him, weapons raised. He could almost hear the battle

cry of Treize Khushrenada as the suit blurred toward him. He raised his beam trident instinctively and it embedded itself into the midsection of the other mobile suit. Arcs of energy wreathed the fatally-damaged Tallgees.

><br> "Noooooooo," Wufei shouted, tears of weakness streaming down his face. "Why Treize . . ."

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>\*\*\*\*\*<br>

> The screen flashed pure white and then there was blackness.<br>> A shudder went through Lady Une and her hands opened and shut helplessly on the console before her as the screen remained empty. Empty. And then the picture reappeared to show nothing but smoke and debris floating in space. Stronger than her despair, was her love and adoration, undiminished by the absolute proof that he was gone. He was gone and it was all up to her now. She couldn't let his death be for nothing, that would be tragedy indeed. She had loved a soldier and he was gone. But his sacrifice would live forever and he would be a hero, she would see to it. But for now she had to save the Earth. The Earth Treize had loved above all things, herself included.<br>

> For Treize she would even endure the humiliation of surrender. Theirs had always been a union of the mind and spirit. He would never really be gone from her, in a way now he would always be hers. Alive in the depths of her heart and her soul in all his magnificent nobility. His spirit had but melded now into hers and they would always be together until someday she joined him in that other place. Their own Valhalla . . .<br>

> Linnea clearly felt the physical presence of Treize disappearing, leaving her behind like the slow caress of a rose petal against her skin or a breeze playing with the ends of her hair.<br>

> How could he be dead, the most vibrant presence in her life? Her protector, the only one it had seemed who had thought she was necessary. His approval the glue that held her together in the face of all her indecision in this crazy mess of a war. Why wasn't she falling apart now? Had she ever really needed him? Or was that only what he had made her believe?<br>

> Her body ached realizing that it would never feel the touch of that rose again, screamed for the release of tears. Her mind was stunned to discover that the world was going on without him, that she had never needed him. It had all been an illusion designed to keep her at his side. <br>

> And she had sacrificed everything to that flattering illusion.<br>

>TO BE CONTINUED . . . don't worry, it was just getting too long again, I terribly underestimated the length of this chapter. Chapter 8 is coming later this afternoon, I'm home sick (probably from writing on this fic) so I promise it later.<br>

> <p><p>

## 9. Love is a Battlefield, Chapter 8

Author's Note: One word--FINALLY! I'm gonna take a nap now!! Gotta start thinking about Alone/Together: Chapter 10 too. Also don't forget to check out my website for fanart for this story!!!  
<http://midiiune.tripod.com/MidiiUne/index.html> Special thanks to EVERYONE who ever reviewed this story THANK YOU, the epilogue will be up soon, after a discreet pause to honor those who died in battle . . . Please review at this time, thank you!

><br>

>Love is a Battlefield<br>by Midii Une

><br>CHAPTER 8

><br> Lady Une's humiliating surrender accomplished little.

><br> The Libra, with the Peacemillion still wedged permanently inside, was speeding toward Earth. Speeding with as much agility as a hulk of its size could manage on its damaged engines. But it was inevitable, it would hit.

><br> The doors slid open and a group of people entered the MO-II control room.

><br> What a strange group of conspirators was forming to thwart the intentions of Zechs Merquise. Howard, Sally and Relena Peacecraft stared at Lady Une as she welcomed them, her calmness and clarity of thinking eerie in the aftermath of Treize's death.

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br> Quatre strapped himself into Sandrock, exhausted from the hours of battling over the last days of the war, the wound from Dorothy Catalonia's sword burning in his side like it was on fire. But still it wasn't over. All so sad, he thought, remembering the horrible insanity of Dorothy. She was like he was after his father had died turning to war and hatred and revenge to soothe her sorrow. Just one of the horrors of war, it hurt people in so many ways.

><br> He opened his eyes at the sound of Trowa's voice. He hadn't even realized he'd shut them.

><br> "Quatre go back to MO-II," Trowa said. "You shouldn't fight. You need help."

><br> It was a tempting offer, but after everything he couldn't leave now. Every bit of fire power was going to be needed to stop the Libra, if he quit now it might never be over. An angry Earth would never let there be peace in outer space if disaster rained down on it in the form of Libra. The hit of the massive battleship causing an eternal winter.

><br> But if he went to MO-II she would be there. Her wounds as deep as his. But if he wanted to be with Linnea the war had to be over first. It was a thought to keep him going, to keep him conscious even with blood loss and pain threatening to overwhelm him.

><br> "Trowa I'm staying," he said, in a voice his friend couldn't argue with. "But if I don't make it there's something I want you to do."

><br> Trowa shook his head. "If there's something you need to do Quatre just make sure you stay alive to do it yourself," he said, slamming the hatch shut.

><br> He wanted to see her again more than anything. He would make it. He wondered how Trowa knew just what to say to make him want to survive this.

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><br> Howard hid his stare behind the dark glasses he wore night and day. His eyes were sensitive, he'd spent way too much time with a blow torch in his hand adjusting mobile suits. Would her eyes be the same some day, he wondered. No, because the time for mobile suits was coming to an end. The giant mecha soldiers would be no more when peace came, perhaps a few could be salvaged to be converted for mechanical work in outer space but most would rust away or be destroyed.

><br> He stared at Linnea whom he'd only ever seen on a communicator screen. In person the girl was so like her mother that he thought he was seeing a ghost. Poor woman, she'd been overwhelmed with the talent she had, disappeared God knew where so long ago. It took a certain frame of mind to work on weapons of war. It wasn't a job for the weak or faint-hearted, or for those who thought too much about what the mobile suits would do once they were built. It had

frightened the woman he'd known, she'd seemed strong enough when she'd first joined their team. Her ideas on Tallgees invaluable, astounding all of them as she easily found solutions to problems that had plagued them for months in constructing the prototype Leo.

><br> Linnea was Marta all over again. Same hair and eyes, same frightened girl hiding behind her brains. Perhaps she thought maybe because she was a genius she shouldn't have fears like other people. Seemed to him people like her had more reason to be afraid than the rest of them. They could see further, imagine things the rest of them wouldn't dream of. It was a gift and a curse she had. Her father had been a cold son of a bitch and obviously hadn't taught her how to deal with it. She looked ready to bolt and run if someone were to so much as drop a wrench.

><br> Linnea was the only child born to that group of scientists, engineers and technicians that had built the original mobile suit. What was going to become of her, their future, if they actually achieved peace?

><br> He thought of Duo, that boy was almost like a son to him. He hoped to hell those two would work things out. She needed looking after.

><br> Howard halted his musings on the past and future. The present was requiring all the attention he could give it right now. Everyone was in place, the chances were slim but he had confidence in those pilots and their machines. If it were possible, they would save the Earth and they'd be able to give peace a fighting chance.

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> <br> Her eyes blinked but the explosion was burned into her vision like an old-fashioned flashbulb. Libra exploding in a brilliant display of fire.

><br> Zechs.

><br> He hadn't let her stay with him at the end. She had deserted everything to be with him. Noin floated there in her Taurus Mobile Suit. Alone in space, a tiny speck of white set against the black velvet pinpricked with tinier white stars.

><br> Her tearless eyes stared out at the endless darkness and she vaguely felt wonder that she could still breathe, that her heart should still beat, albeit it was thudding painfully against her ribs and her breath was coming in short ragged gasps.

><br> Why wasn't she dead too? Why hadn't her heart stopped its painful beating, how could she still breathe? Without Zechs. How could she exist in a universe without him in it?

><br> It had become clear to her when he came to attack Peacemillion. Suddenly her mind had grasped what he was doing. He was doing this all for peace and it had worked. His brilliant mind had discovered the only way to true peace. He had shown the Earth and he had shown outer space the true evil of war.

><br> No.

><br> Her mind stayed clear and lucid but her heart embraced the insanity of wild hope. If she was still alive then he couldn't be dead. He was the Lightning Count, the greatest pilot ever known. Why had she doubted? Why did she feel sadness?

><br> "Oh Zechs," she whispered, blinking her eyes at last as hot tears slid down her cheeks. "I doubted you. Forgive me."

><br> "Come back to me soon."

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> <br> It was over. The brilliant flash of the final destruction of the Libra had faded and realization was sweeping over them all. The Earth had been saved, the colonies would now enjoy a peaceful

relationship with the planet all the people had originated from. She should be happy but Linnea only felt numb. Had Dorothy been right about her after all? Was there any need for her in a world without war? She had no family, no friends, no purpose. Well, maybe that wasn't true. Howard insisted that Duo still cared about her. But that was hard to believe, the pain of his rejection in the Cinq Kingdom throbbed like a new wound. Now that Treize was dead she was seeing her actions clearly for the first time in a long time.

><br> Everyone was celebrating, quietly it was true, but the atmosphere of the MO-II control room fairly reeked with relief and joy. She wasn't strong like Lady Une. She ached from Treize's death but part of her hated him for deluding her as he had. And she had fallen to his manipulations so easily that she also despised herself. She despised herself for feeling so lost without him in the world. He'd made her come to depend on his approval, like a drug addiction. Everything in her life had set her up for this, her father's jealousy and constant rejection. She had been so starved for approval, for love, from Duo and when he rejected her, from Treize.

><br> An inner voice taunted, a voice that sounded suspiciously like Dorothy Catalonia's, no one will ever love you now. They loved you because of what you could do for them, because no one else in this world could give them the power to chase their dreams, not like you could. There's no place for you Linnea Lang, not in a peaceful universe.

><br> She slipped out of the bridge and leaned against the doors as they softly slid shut behind her. She didn't belong in there. She didn't know if she belonged anywhere.

><br> "I've got to be alone," she thought. "I've got to think."

><br> She walked aimlessly through the blank, monotonous corridors. Howard wanted her to stay, asked her to promise. She hadn't answered. She wasn't sure she was strong enough to face Duo. "I'm a coward," she admitted.

><br> She almost collided with a white-faced girl dragging an IV line, weaving almost drunkenly in the hall. Linnea snapped out her self-absorption and grabbed onto the girl who looked like she was about to drop from pain or exhaustion or both. Her eyes were dazed and heavy with pain-killing drugs.

><br> She clutched Linnea's arm so tightly it hurt. "I have to find him," she said, her voice slurred. "I have to find out . . ."

><br> Linnea sighed, getting this badly injured girl back to bed had to be her priority right now. She almost welcomed the distraction from the questions in her mind that had no answers and the burning ache in her heart. She turned the slight girl in the direction of the infirmary and got her to go back to bed, she'd have to find a medical technician to hook her IV back up. She looked at the name on her ID bracelet.

><br> Hilde Schbeiker.

><br> "I'm going to find someone to help you," she said soothingly, patting the girl's hand and preparing to leave.

><br> "No," Hilde said, grabbing at her hand with surprising determination. "Please. Help me. I have to find out. I have to know what happened."

><br> Hilde studied the girl, it was dark in the room but she could see she wore the uniform of the enemy. The uniform she herself had worn when she'd met Duo. Oh Duo, she thought, you must still be alive. I'm holding on because of you. Desperation kept her awake, enabled her to move her injured body, kept her searching for the answers. Why had she met him, why had she come to embrace his way of thinking if only to lose him now? It couldn't end that way, he must

be coming back to her . . .

><br> "Where am I," she asked the girl, it didn't seem like she was still on Peacemillion. Enemy or not, she had helped her, and for all she knew they weren't enemies any more. Could it all be over? Had it come to an end while she lay unconscious struggling to live?

><br> "You're on MO-II. The Peacemillion crew evacuated here. It's all over, the battle's over," Linnea explained.

><br> "I guess this is peace."

><br> "Who won," Hilde asked softly.

><br> "I-I think we all did," Linnea said, starting to believe it herself a little. The reality sinking in. "The Libra was destroyed before it could hit Earth. The colonies have pledged to a peaceful relationship with the World Nation."

><br> Hilde closed her eyes. Peace. But what had been the cost? Damn, she felt so groggy, she had to struggle to talk, to ask the questions she needed to ask, every word she uttered was a small victory.

><br> "But is he alright," she said again, not realizing she didn't make any sense to the girl she was speaking to. "I love him so much. He just has to be alright. Do you know?"

><br> "Who? I'm sorry I don't know who you're talking about," Linnea prodded gently, wanting to help. Remembering her own agonizing tension when Libra had exploded and the wave of relief washing over her when the report came in that all the Gundams were confirmed safe.

><br> "A Gundam pilot," Hilde said, speaking becoming difficult.  
"He's a Gundam pilot."

><br> Linnea knew suddenly before the other girl spoke. It flashed through her brain with a strange certainty.

><br> "Duo Maxwell," Hilde said.

><br> Linnea pulled her hand away and turned to the wall, biting her lip. She heard Howard insisting that she stay.

><br> "Talk to him. It's not too late, it's never too late," Howard had insisted.

><br> What the hell did Howard know? It was too late, far too late.

><br> "Please tell me," the girl on the bed begged.

><br> Linnea turned back to her, studying her, trying to picture her with Duo and finding it all too easy to do so.

><br> "Don't worry," she finally managed to say. "They're fine. They're all fine. They're on their way here now. It won't be long."

><br> Hilde closed her eyes.

><br> "Duo," she breathed.

><br> "Duo," Linnea repeated. "I'm nothing to you now. Nothing."

><br> Hilde looked at the girl standing there. Tears were slipping silently down her cheeks.

><br> "I'm sorry," she managed, sleepiness overwhelming her not that her mission was over and she knew he was safe. "Did you lose someone today? The one you love."

><br> Linnea was silent so long that Hilde started to wonder if she'd heard her.

><br> "Yes," she said at last. "I lost."

><br> "I'm sorry," Hilde said, her eyelids growing heavier. "Thank you for telling me. I guess in all the excitement the others forgot about me. Who are you? What's your name?"

><br> Linnea ignored the question. She brushed back the hair off Hilde's forehead and looked at her closely, then squeezed her eyes shut.

><br> "Just get some rest. He'll be here soon to see you, I know," she said.

><br> When she opened her eyes again the girl on the bed was already asleep. Hilde Schbeiker, the girl Duo loved.

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> She looked despondent enough to jump out of the airlock. If she did Vier wondered if he would stop her, push her, join her or merely watch. Her pale hair fell forward over her face as she leaned heavily against the door, her hand resting on the heavy pull lever as he watched her from a shadowed corner of the docking area.<br>

> Linnea was afraid. Afraid to be alone, afraid to come face to face with her former allies, afraid that while she lived there would always be the possibility that she would build something like Epyon again.<br>

> But Epyon saved everything, in the end. She reminded herself that thoughts like those were so very dangerous.<br>

> "You should be careful, it isn't safe to stand so close to the airlock," a soft voice said, a hint of sadness and understanding evident in it.<br>

> Linnea turned.<br>

> "Lady Une," she said. "I suppose you're right. I was just looking out there, and thinking. Thinking that already it's as if the battle never was, the debris is scattered and the people on Earth and the colonies have probably already gone on with their lives. Another threat ended and so life goes on."<br>

> The older woman took a deep breath. Her pain was unbearable, she knew that the feeling would be permanent and that she would have to get used to it. And yet only this girl could know in the smallest way how she felt. In a way they were the same and she needed her help if what she planned was going to work. A small wistful smile curved her lips and she saw Treize before her in her mind, strong and untouchable, handsome and noble. She hoped he would approve, perhaps he wouldn't, but his beautiful sacrifice should not go unrecognized by the people. He was their savior and his name should live forever, forever linked with the permanent peace he had died for. "Mr. Treize," she thought. "I'm trying to understand, trying to do what you would desire of me."<br>

> As Lady Une began to speak quietly to the girl about her plans, Vier turned away in disgust. Peace couldn't last and he'd learned a lot from Linnea Lang. Somewhere out there someone must still be interested in the technology of war, he'd find them.<br>

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> She looked just like a little kid, a very sick little kid, he thought. Her face was white and her breathing was rapid, but there was a tiny smile on her face. It was almost angelic. And she had come too damn close to becoming just that, Duo thought, scalding pain rising up in his soul from merely thinking about it.<br>

> "Hilde," Duo whispered. "Hey come on. Wake up. Don't you want to hear what happened?"<br>

> Although she curled her hand into his when he touched her cold fingers with his, Hilde didn't wake up. Once she was sure Duo had survived her body had been unable to resist falling into the deep sleep it needed to recover.<br>

> He smiled at her hand in his and rubbed his other hand over her chilly small one. "You found a way to get out of hearing me talk all about how great I was out there, huh? Go ahead and sleep, I'll talk your ear off some other time."<br>

> He stood in the doorway and looked at her. They said she was going

to be alright but she looked so white and still. What if she had died? But she didn't, he said to himself, somehow she escaped the curse of getting involved with Shinigami.<br>

> "I meant what I said, before on Peacemillion, Hilde," he muttered. "I love you, but I don't know what to do about it. You don't need to get stuck with a guy like me. Look at you, look at all the pain I caused you. If I could take it on myself Hilde I would."<br>

>\*\*\*\*\*<br> Wufei floated in Nataku, eyes closed, as he had so many times after battles both in victory and defeat. His face was slack and his arms hung loosely at his sides.

><br> The kick of adrenaline and sanity he had felt when he had forced himself into Libra to toss Heero his buster rifle had been his final confident act.

><br> He kept seeing Treize. A valiant and noble fighter.

><br> Hearing Treize. Remembering all those who had died in battle for his sake, even though the number reached nearly 100,000.

><br> And he knew now that since the time they had dueled he had lived only to fight Treize. And now he was dead.

><br> So should he be. But the greatest weakness was to take one's own life. Yet who was out there that was strong enough to kill him in battle? Battles were over, soldiers were unnecessary. He had fought to keep unnecessary battles from erupting around the colonies and outer space.

><br> Yet his colony had destroyed itself to allow him the freedom to fight unimpeded. Meiran had destroyed herself to force him to see his own superior strength. What reason was there for him now to go on.

><br> Perhaps he would just float here forever. Go into a trance as he had on the Lunar Base and simply never come back.

><br> Or perhaps he would look for a new battle to fight.

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> "Did you find her Trowa," Quatre asked, his voice a little breathy from the puncture wound in his right lung.<br>

> The other pilot shook his head. "Howard said he hasn't seen her since shortly after the Libra exploded. He's guessing she took a shuttle and went off somewhere," Trowa said.<br>

> Quatre lay back and shut his eyes. The war was over but he felt defeated. She was still hurting, still running. There must still be a lot of people left like that. He'd truly believed that when it was all over he'd find her there. But life wasn't like that, it didn't provide a pat and happy ending. The fighting was over but the wounds of war were far from healed. Look at poor Dorothy for instance.<br>

> Perhaps the best thing to do would be to leave Linnea alone. Probably the last person she'd ever want to see would be a Gundam pilot. He'd only bring back painful memories for her. It was true, he thought, once you'd saved someone's life you were connected, he felt responsible for Linnea. If only he could be sure she was safe and happy . . . oh Allah, who was he trying to fool. If only she were sitting here beside him, holding his hand and looking at him with love and concern in her eyes. Looking at him just the way she'd looked at Duo.<br>

> Trowa sat in the chair beside the bed. He'd never seen Quatre look that way before, but maybe it was just the drugs they'd given him for the pain.<br>

> "How much do you love her," he asked suddenly.<br>

> Quatre's eyes popped open. It was a strange question, particularly from Trowa. But, then again, not so strange. His friend was known to

make amazingly astute commentaries when the occasion arose.<br>> "More than anything. If she wants me to leave her alone . . . if that's what makes her happy . . ." he started to say.<br>> Trowa interrupted.<br>> "Sometimes when you love someone you have to be selfish Quatre," he said quietly, so quietly that Quatre nearly had to hold his breath to hear him. "Tell her how you feel. Show her how much you want her or she won't know. You owe yourself that much. You owe her that much. You have to find her."<br>> Before Quatre could answer Duo bounced cheerfully into the room precariously balancing three crystal champagne flutes in his hand.<br>> "Hey," he exclaimed, grinning widely although the smile on his face didn't quite reach his eyes. "Why the gloomy faces? We won!"<br>> He handed each of the other pilots an empty glass.<br>> Trowa gave Duo an odd look but Quatre managed an understanding smile, the pain medication was finally starting to take effect.<br>> "Sorry," Duo shrugged. "Quatre requested non-alcoholic and this is the closest I could get."<br>> "Cheers," they all said, clinking their glasses together.<br>> TO BE CONTINUED . . . Next time on Love is a Battlefield: Epilogue . . . <br>A month after the Eve Wars Linnea meets a Gundam pilot at Treize's grave, who is it . . . Will this 'Endless Fic' finally be over, or is a whole new chapter starting to unfold?!?!?!"<br>

## 10. Love is a Battlefield, Epilogue

Author's Note: Yay, the end!! Look for the next part of this series, Ordinary World, coming soon. Thanks again for all those who supported this story! Sorry to be driving you all crazy with the suspense, you'll get some answers in the next story, I promise!!

><br>>Love is a Battlefield: Epilogue<br>>by Midii Une<br>> Duo Maxwell stared at the burned out hangar, there really wasn't a hell of a lot left to salvage. He was a busy man, after the war there was plenty of clean-up to do, up in space and here on the colonies themselves. There was plenty to do so why had he taken this particular job?<br>> Where are you Linnea, he wondered.<br>> "Hey," a feminine voice called out, and he turned startled, almost expecting to see her running down the path, almost did see Linnea, the edges of her navy blue skirt fluttering behind her, sleeves rolled up and strands of blonde hair dangling next to her face.<br>> It wasn't her. It was only a girl who'd gone to the high school they'd attended. Had it only been the previous winter? Only a year ago that he'd met Linnea.<br>> "Hey," he greeted the girl, he'd long since forgotten her name.<br>> "I guess you must have heard about Linnea dying in this blast," the girl chattered. "That was terrible, everyone was so upset. But I heard they were building mobile suits in there, I guess one of them must have blown up."<br>> "Yeah," Duo said. "I guess so." So much for that theory, Linnea hadn't come back here, everyone on this colony still thought she'd died when the hangar exploded. No clues, there never were.<br>

> "Well," he said, trying to move the girl along. "I better get started, I'm in the salvage business now and this is one of my projects." <br>

> He had to be getting back to Hilde. She needed him around, she was still recovering from her battle injuries. Sometimes he wanted so much to repeat the words she hadn't heard. Tell her that he loved her. But even though the war was over he still felt cursed somehow. And he wanted to find Linnea first, wanted to be sure . . . <br>

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> It was if she had never existed, as if everything about her had been deleted from official records. Linnea Lang -- sorry your search turned up no results, please try again. Quatre nearly slammed the lid of his laptop down. But he realized it wasn't any use blaming the computer. When he got over this wound he'd look for her himself, until then he wasn't getting anywhere using these channels. Maybe things would be better in a few months, things were still settling down with the new world government and alliance of space colonies<br>

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><br> "Damn you Treize Khushrenada," he said, his words emanating puffs of frost. He stood at the gates of the cemetery, bowing his head as conflicting feelings wracked his mind.

><br> It hadn't been so long ago he had been a peaceful scholar, a future of study and solitude looming pleasantly ahead of him. He hadn't thought he was strong enough to get involved in the conflict, hadn't thought he was strong enough to stand up against the factions that held the colonies hostage in their web of domination.

><br> But she had shown him differently. Meiran. And when she died her spirit had entered him somehow, made him like her. A strong warrior that hated the weak. And now he could not change back again.

><br> But now there was nothing to fight against. He was filled with bitterness and the one person who might have understood and whom he had not even begun to understand until the moment before his death was gone. Every day his regret for that act grew a little deeper, growing like an infection in his very soul.

><br> Chang Wufei wanted to be alone with Treize, wanted to scream for justice, wanted to see if his spirit remained here in his resting place. He wanted to be alone.

> <br> But he wasn't. Although the gates to the cemetery were locked at this hour, he could see small footsteps in the February snow and in the distance, right where he knew Treize's grave was, he could see a solitary figure, dressed in black.

><br> He could tell it was a woman even from this distance. He could see her breath, like his, white in the cold dawn air.

><br> Linnea brushed the snow off the top of the gravestone with a black-gloved hand and placed a small rosebud there. She rubbed her hands together and the wind kicked up blowing the hair that hung under the black wool scarf around her and into her face, she pushed it back.

><br> She sighed. Every day since he died his hold over her lessened a little bit, but still she came. Being here helped her remember the things she wasn't ready to forget, helped her renew her promise to work now only for peace.

><br> Suddenly she heard the crunch of ice and spun around in surprise, hoping it might be Lady Une and praying it wouldn't be Dorothy Catalonia. Dorothy was the reason she always came so early, she didn't want to run into her here or anywhere for that matter and so far she had eluded her.

><br> Wufei cursed as their eyes met, he'd just wanted to get closer, he hadn't wanted to alert the woman to his presence. Linnea's violet eyes narrowed. She could guess who he was, although she had never met him and he was only a black silhouette against the snow as the sun had finally risen fully behind him and momentarily hid his identity.

><br> Treize's killer. She felt the pain and shock of his death rush back full force and all her loyalty to him as well.

><br> "If it isn't the personification of justice," she said, they'd all heard his words during the battle. Who the hell did he think he was?

><br> "Who are you," Wufei said, his bottomless black eyes flicking over her angrily. He hated women with attitudes. Didn't they know they were all so weak.

><br> In her anger, Linnea forgot to hide her identity as Lady Une had recommended. "Start all over, start a new life. Help me honor Treize's memory by promoting this era of peace," the words echoed far away but she was feeling less than peaceful right now. Human beings had to work so much harder to be peaceful than warlike. Peace was against their very natures.

><br> "I'm Linnea Lang," she said.

><br> "Ah," he said, recognizing the name. "The little weapons maker. Someone else the world has no use for. Someone else the world would be much better off without. Do you even realize that, woman? Both of us should be as dead as he is. We're obsolete, the warrior and the weapons maker. We aren't necessary in this peaceful world."

><br> Suddenly and swiftly his sword appeared and he pointed it at her, slightly surprised that she faced him calmly without flinching.

><br> "Care to join me in hell," he offered. "Those who created the Gundams are as guilty as I am, maybe more. People shouldn't have that kind of power."

><br> It wasn't calm that kept Linnea rooted to her spot. It was shock. He was on the verge of insanity. He had come here to die and here she was, nowhere to run, nowhere to hide in this field of sparkling white.

><br> She found her voice.

><br> "You're a coward," she said. "Find something to do with your life, change to meet the new times."

><br> "Shut up," he whispered, touching the tip of the sword to her throat, just beneath her jawline.

><br> She had made mistakes, dreadful mistakes but she wanted to live anyway, didn't want to die here in the snow because of his warped sense of justice. He had already killed Treize for it. She defiantly reached up and grabbed the blade with her gloved hand.

><br> "Who are you to decide whether I live or die? Who gave you the power to decide justice? Who were you to kill Treize? It was never you, it was your Gundam that gave you courage. I dare you to keep on living or are you too weak without your mobile suit?"

><br> Damn her she was right, her words pounded in his brain. No, he wasn't afraid, not too weak to keep up the fight. And he still had Nataku, he pictured the mobile suit in his mind. He drew back his sword in a lightning fast move, barely hearing her gasp of surprise and pain as the sharp edge parted the leather glove on her hand and the soft white skin beneath it. Blood welled from the deep cut and she fell to her knees in the snow as the bright red drops fell onto the ground staining the pure whiteness.

><br> He wouldn't tolerate being called a coward, not by anyone. He accepted her challenge, the soldier in him thrived on a dare.

><br> "You may be sorry you stopped me," he said, turning to leave

her. "You can be sure I won't forget about you."

><br> She watched him walk away then stared as the blood, her blood, spread in patterns through the frozen snow.

><br>The End

><br>Coming Soon . . . Ordinary World . . .

> <p><p>

End

file.